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# THE ✓PRINCETON SEMINARY BULLETIN

VOLUME XXVIII NUMBER 2 NEW SERIES 2007

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The Unexpected Future

IAIN R. TORRANCE

## BACCALAUREATE SERMON

The Excellence of Ministry

DANIEL L. MIGLIORE

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On the Sinking of the Titanic

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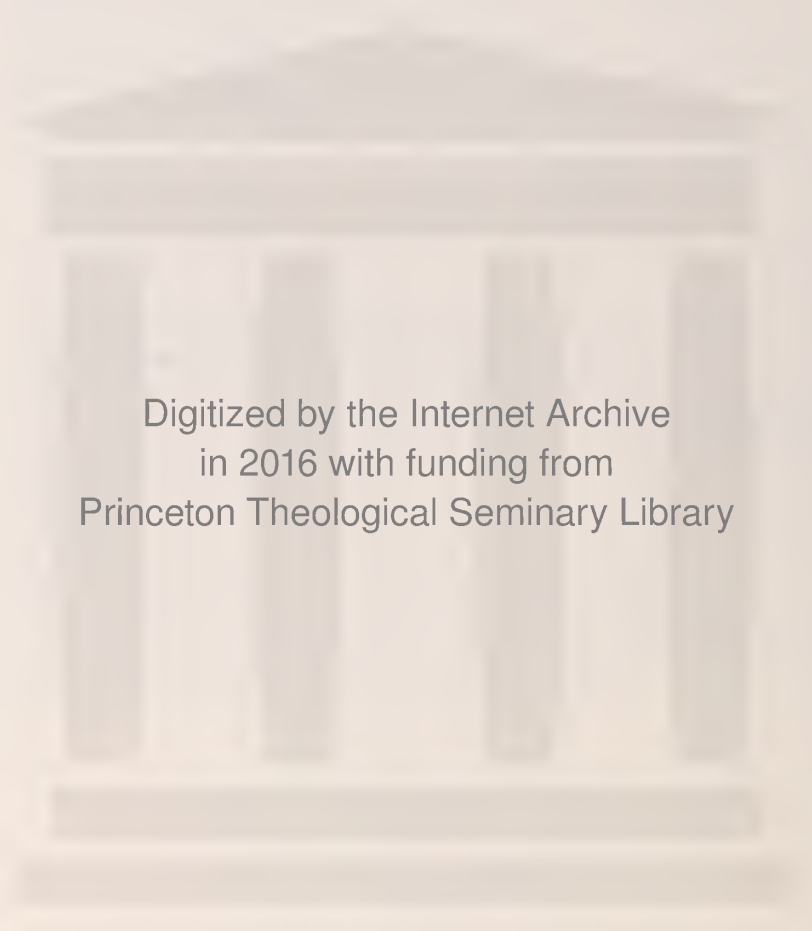
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## Editor's Note

I wish I could tell you that each issue of the *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* is put together according to a time-honored formula that renders the contents as predictable as corn and tomatoes in a New Jersey August. To be sure, year in and year out, the *Bulletin* contains many of the same features, such as the Stone Lectures, the Warfield Lectures, and the Student Mission Lectures. What is unpredictable are the subjects of these lectures and the occasional pieces that come along and are just too interesting to resist. The Karl Barth sermon included here, preached a few days after the sinking of the *Titanic*, is one such article. It just fell into my lap after the director of the Karl Barth Archiv in Basel, Dr. Hans-Anton Drewes, asked me if we would like to publish it. With no disrespect intended, it is not a particularly profound sermon. But it is a solid piece of work written in response to a disaster of international proportions. The piece by Gerhard Sauter was taken from his 2000 Warfield lectures, which were just published this year. Stanley Hauerwas's lecture from a Princeton Forum on Youth Ministry is a great introduction to Hauerwas's thought and a model for communicating complex ideas to young people. Time-honored formula or not, the high quality of the *Bulletin* continues.

STEPHEN D. CROCCO  
EDITOR



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# The Unexpected Future

by IAIN R. TORRANCE

*President Iain R. Torrance delivered this farewell to the graduates at the Seminary Commencement exercises on May 19, 2007, in the Princeton University Chapel. During the ceremonies, Dr. Torrance was awarded an honorary degree (LHD) from King College in Bristol, Tennessee. In his speech, Dr. Torrance salutes William H. Gray III, who was honored as Princeton Seminary's 2007 Distinguished Alumnus. Dr. Gray is chairman of the Amani Group, a governmental, educational, and business advisory group, and served as president and chief executive officer of The College Fund/United Negro College Fund from 1991 to 2004.*

**Y**ou are our newest graduates and I congratulate you most warmly. Most of you came here with me. I know many of you. This is a place of which to be proud, and you have earned demanding and universally admired qualifications. I congratulate you and greet you as new alums of this great school.

I salute Dr. Gray, your distinguished fellow alum, who is one of the most significant and honored Americans alive.

King College has honored me today with a degree. I am deeply grateful for that recognition of my commitment to both the church and the liberal arts. I liked King College the moment I set foot on its campus in 2006. Its mountains reminded me of home, and I am proud to be a King College alumnus.

Dr. Gray is the recipient of some eighty honorary degrees, so let's have no illusions over who is the most distinguished person here today. One of our trustees, in a recent conversation, said to me that there are some persons who come to an illustrious institution and say: "I must be wonderful because I am here!" There are others who say: "Because I am here this school's reputation is going to be sustained." Dr. Gray is that latter kind of person. He always brings more than he receives. He is someone who creates a new future, not someone who basks in the warm glow of yesterday.

I ask you, the new graduates, to be that kind of person. The future will never be the same as the past, be sure of that. The glow of yesterday is a deceptive light.

Let me offer a few random thoughts.

Last August I gave a convocation speech at King College. I spoke about the philosophy of the Enlightenment, Shakespeare, art, and our Christian faith. In the context of a liberal arts school, I wanted students to see that progress most probably lies in unexpected directions and that ambiguity and depth are allies, not foes, as we seek to discern the future. Ready acceptance of easy or literal answers is a denial of our history, and today's is a very literal culture. Schools such as King provide the core knowledge and awareness that make our work here, at master's level, possible.

Very many of you, our new graduates, will enter some form of service to the church. That service may be teaching, pastoral, or something beyond the church's visible structures, but a ministry nonetheless.

Nobody knows how the church will develop or the specific forms its obedience to God will take under the direction of the Holy Spirit. To our new graduates I'd say, if we fill your minds with too much specification, we train you for obsolescence. For a moment, let's think about progress. An April issue of *The Economist* had a special report on the coming wireless revolution. I want to quote a little. "The *computing* revolution was about information—digitizing documents, photographs, and records so that they could more easily be manipulated. The *wireless*-communications revolution is about making digital information about anything available anywhere at almost no cost."<sup>1</sup> (My emphasis.) It continues: "It is hard for anyone—politicians most of all—to picture how wireless will be used, just as it was with electric motors and microprocessors. . . . Wireless technology will become part of objects in the next fifty years rather as electric motors appeared in everything from eggbeaters to elevators in the first half of the 20th century and computers colonized all kinds of machinery . . . in the second half."<sup>2</sup>

New technology will stimulate new language and concepts. It will have to, and you would expect that. Hence we have "ubiquitous computing," "embedded networking," and the "pervasive internet."<sup>3</sup> Progress always has hurdles to surmount. *The Economist* goes on to note: "As is usual in the early days of a new industry, all kinds of proprietary systems abound."<sup>4</sup>

Progress, when it comes, will always be unexpected. "Wireless technology is akin to the electrical grid, which was originally intended for a particular use, the lightbulb, but whose 'killer application' turned out to be the power socket that allowed a multitude of new and unforeseen devices to draw energy

<sup>1</sup> "The coming wireless revolution: When everything connects," *The Economist*, April 28–May 4, 2007, 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> "A special report on telecoms," *The Economist*, April 28–May 4, 2007, 3–4.

<sup>4</sup> "When everything connects," 11.

from it. *In time, the new wireless technologies will likewise reshape society in unpredictable ways.*"<sup>5</sup> (Author's emphasis.)

How will the church develop and change? It is the sheer unpredictability I draw to your attention. It is not knight's move. That's predictable. Progress comes through recognizing innovation and serving it humbly. That's what Bill Gray has done with the United Negro College Fund.

To succeed, which is what I so much want for you, you must engage in open-ended and unscripted dialogue. Do not become locked into proprietary brands—neither academic departments nor academic guilds will exist in the kingdom of heaven. Beware of the sanctimonious. Here is a quotation for you.

Who steals my purse steals trash—'tis something—nothing,  
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands—  
But he that filches from me my good name  
Robs me of that which not enriches him  
And makes me poor indeed. (Shakespeare, *Othello*: Act 3, 3, 159–164)

Where does that come from? From Shakespeare, of course, and I'm pretty smitten by Shakespeare. But who said it? It's spoken by Iago, the very nastiest person in *Othello*. What I want you to see is that it is empty rhetoric. Iago didn't live out those words in his life. That's the irony. The play addresses racism, but not in the easy way, handling it as an abstract, but through a thick description, taking account of envy, ambition, and sexual jealousy.

Here's the point: in face of your challenges, in the shock of the new, how familiar is Iago's barricade of injured dignity? If you shelter there, you will get nowhere.

A few days ago Boris Yeltsin died. Alexander Solzhenitsyn called him "almost too Russian." This quotation is from an obituary: "For millions of Russians, it seemed that Mr. Yeltsin's liberalization of prices in 1992—not the bankruptcy of the Soviet Union—had plunged them into poverty. He refused to back off. Unlike Mr. Gorbachev, he did not want to reform the communist system. *He wanted to break its neck.*"<sup>6</sup> (Author's emphasis.)

When Boris Yeltsin handed over power to Vladimir Putin, he asked for forgiveness from the Russian people. He said: "I ask you to forgive me for not fulfilling the hopes of those people who believed that we would be able to jump from the grey, stagnating, totalitarian past into a bright, rich, and

<sup>5</sup> "The coming wireless revolution: Marconi's brainwave," *The Economist*, April 28–May 4, 2007, 4–6.

<sup>6</sup> "Boris Yeltsin," *The Economist*, April 28–May 4, 2007, 98.

civilized future in one go. I myself believed in this. But it could not be done in one fell swoop."<sup>7</sup>

The flexibility permitted by granting and receiving forgiveness is central to being open to progress. It also happens to be central to the teaching of Jesus. Forgive and be forgiven. Do this and you will live.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

# The Excellence of Ministry

by DANIEL L. MIGLIORE

*Dr. Daniel L. Migliore is the Charles Hodge Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. He delivered this sermon in the baccalaureate service at Nassau Presbyterian Church in Princeton on May 18, 2007.*

"You excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking." 2 Cor. 8:7

"**Y**ou excel in everything . . ." I wonder if Paul composed these words thinking he would be preaching at a baccalaureate service. Just look at us, all dressed up in our elegant attire. Look at the gowns of the faculty, adorned with the stripes and colors of academic excellence. And look at the graduating class, clad in their dignified, if somewhat austere, robes, poised to receive diplomas that will give them the titles "Master of Divinity," "Doctor of Ministry," or "Doctor of Philosophy." "You excel in everything. . ."

So how do you preach about the excellence of ministry in a setting as rich with talent, accomplishment, and promise as that represented here this afternoon? Attending closely to the words of the Apostle Paul would be a good start. In the passage from the Second Letter to the Church at Corinth, read this afternoon, Paul urges his brothers and sisters to contribute generously to the collection he is gathering for the poor in Jerusalem. This collection is obviously of some importance to Paul. Recall that when he was acknowledged as apostle to the Gentiles by the leaders of the Jerusalem church, he promised to honor their request to remember the poor. With the letter, Paul fulfills that promise. He also provides his mission churches with an opportunity to enter more fully into the new life in Christ by expressing their solidarity with all the saints in a very concrete way. Clearly, there is a lot at stake for Paul, as well as for his understanding of the very nature of Christian ministry, in this collection for the poor in Jerusalem.

So ministry is all about money, is it? Well, money is important, as you will soon find out if the congregation you serve does not think so. Ministry is not all about money, but money has to do with economy, and Christian life and ministry have very much to do with economy—the economy of God's grace and the economy of divine gift-giving. In this very down-to-earth matter of a collection for the poor, Paul helps the Corinthians and us to understand how God's economy works and in what sense we can properly speak of the excellence of ministry within that economy.



Let us look more closely at the text. The apostle puts in play all of his considerable rhetorical skills as he begins by reminding the Corinthians just how generous the churches of Macedonia have been. You do not want to be second to them, do you? Paul asks. This opening strategy betrays something of the fierce competitive spirit of the apostle. As we know, he could sometimes brag a bit that in his earlier years he was a far more zealous adherent of the law than all his Pharisee competitors. But Paul's real concern for the Corinthians is not with competition in the name of Christ but with deepening the communion with Christ.

So the apostle tries another strategy. He compliments his congregation, maybe a bit too much, almost as if delivering a baccalaureate sermon to the graduating class of Corinth Theological Seminary and their proud faculty, family, and friends. I suggest it is a little too much in view of what we know of the Corinthian community from Paul's own correspondence with them. Remember their many quarrels and divisions? Nevertheless, Paul now concentrates on the positive: "As you excel in everything," he writes, "so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking." The strategy—telling them they are an impressive group of people, in faith, speech, knowledge, eagerness, and love—seems designed to encourage the Corinthians to dig a little deeper into their pockets. Who would not be motivated by this praise to work a little harder and give a little more?

But if either of these strategies—the competitive or the complimentary—had been the substance of Paul's appeal to the Corinthian church, he would not have helped them or us to understand what really makes for the excellence of ministry. Paul has just been warming up. The competitive and complimentary strategies are merely prolegomena to what Paul really wants to say. Paul wants to speak of God's economy because that is what defines what excellent ministry is all about. It is an economy in which abundance and poverty are strangely exchanged, in which God's extraordinary gift frees us to be faithful gift-givers, in which the extravagant generosity of God gives us the privilege and power to take part in God's generosity in our own ministry.

Paul wants us to know first and foremost that the excellence of ministry is grounded in the surpassing grace of God that has been extended to us all in Jesus Christ. "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," he writes, "that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich."

*That's* where Paul would really have us begin in thinking about ministry: with the astonishing economy of God, in which the Son of God takes on our poverty, our sin, and our death that we might receive his wealth, his righ-



teousness, and his life. The crucified and risen Christ is the divine economy in person. In him we see the unsurpassable excellence of ministry.

In the light of his gift to us, what becomes of the spirit of competition? Can we compete with God's gift in Christ? What becomes of all our touted abilities and virtues? Are they, after all, very impressive compared with what Christ has given to us? You see, when it comes to excellence in ministry, we are not the primary subjects. We can boast only about what *this* minister—this incarnate, crucified, and resurrected Son of God—has done for us and given to us.

So notwithstanding his initial rhetorical strategies, Paul is perfectly clear about the real foundation of excellence in ministry. It is not found in our victory in competition with the churches down the street. It is not found in the wealth of our doctrinal knowledge, in our pastoral care skills, or in the eloquence of speech that we have acquired and that now enables us to impress others. Rather, Paul points to Jesus Christ as the unsurpassable gift of God, the centerpiece of the divine economy of grace, the one and only foundation and power of ministerial excellence.

Excellence is hard to define because it is the standard against which all else is measured. It is what stands out, what stands above all else. Jesus Christ defines, embodies, and empowers excellent ministry—he is minister par excellence. No wonder, then, that Paul begins his collection appeal in chapter eight by declaring, "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ . . ." and concludes his appeal in chapter nine by exclaiming, "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift." To talk about the excellence of ministry is to begin and end with Jesus Christ and his ministry to and for us all.

But in his description of the excellence of ministry, Paul does not stop with the reminder of God's great gift to us. He insists that we have a part in this ministry and that our ministry, too, has an excellence. Having recalled what Christ has done for us and given to us, Paul says, "It is appropriate that you who began last year not only to do something but to desire to do something, now finish doing it . . ." Finish what you have begun, Paul says; complete the service that you said you desired to render, a gift to the poor in response to God's great gift.

In describing our part in ministry, Paul quickly explains that he is not issuing a command, he is urging and encouraging. Our participation in the gift-giving economy of God is not a prescription but a privilege, not something forced but something fitting.

It is also clear that for Paul, our part in the gift-giving ministry of Christ is not somehow to replace his gift or to make up for some deficiency in it. Our part is simply to pass on the gift, to pass it on freely and eagerly in the power

of God's spirit. In the economy of grace, the gift *given* becomes the gift *to be given*. God's astonishing gift is to be received in gratitude and then passed on. To receive the grace of God is to be energized for service. In the life of faith and in ministry, we are caught up in the gift-giving economy of God.

Paul's words urging the Corinthian church to finish what it had begun apply with striking relevance to the situation in which we find ourselves here today. You graduating students began a journey when you arrived here at Princeton Seminary. Many of you came here with a mixture of commitment and uncertainty. You felt called to prepare yourselves for some form of ministry. You desired to be of service to church and world, though you were—and perhaps still are—not entirely sure what form that service might take. You have studied hard to prepare yourself for the vocation God has in store for you. You have stretched your mind, your imagination, and your spirit, and you have caught at least a glimpse of the excellence of ministry that will not soon leave you.

Now finish what you have begun, the Apostle Paul writes. If you have come to understand a bit more of the incalculable wealth of God's gift to the world in Jesus Christ, now pass on the gift. Enter into the excellence of this ministry by which the generous self-gift of Christ is passed on through you to others by the power of his word and spirit. Let the excellence of Christ's ministry shape your ministry and, in your ministry, reflect his ministry. Share the riches of the gospel with others. Be ambassadors of forgiveness and reconciliation. Take part in the advocacy of God's justice and peace in every corner of the world. Urge your congregation, your community, and your nation to remember the poor and the needy, as Paul urged his congregations to do. Keep alive the Christian witness of solidarity with the poor in the consumer culture of modern America, as Paul did in the class-conscious culture of ancient Corinth. Invite others to see that if God honored our humanity by taking on our flesh, we too should honor the flesh of our brothers and sisters by tending it rather than by neglecting or torturing it. With joy, freely share with others your faith in God, your love of Christ, your unwavering hope for God's coming reign.

The excellence of ministry is found first of all in the gift given by God in Jesus Christ. It is then appropriately reflected in the joy, eagerness, and freedom with which we pass on the gift, the gift to be given. The excellence of our ministry comes into sight when passing on the gift is not simply a job but a joy.

The apostle has one further thing to say to us in this passage about divine economy and excellence in ministry. He speaks to a concern that the Corinthians must surely have had and that, in honesty, we have, as well. When we

take part in gift-giving, when we share freely with others what God has given to us, are we not exposed to spiritual and material depletion? Can we go on giving and giving without sooner or later finding ourselves totally empty? I think the apostle anticipates these questions. He answers them by telling us something more about the marvels of the divine economy, the economy of God's gift-giving, and how our passing on the gift is quite different from the economies of our everyday world.

In our economies, we expect a rapid and tangible return when we give something, or else we feel a great loss. God's economy of gift-giving is excellent because it works in a very different way. God is not diminished by becoming poor for our sake. God is not less exalted by being humbled for our sake. On the contrary, God is nowhere richer and nowhere more majestic than he is when he becomes poor and humble for us and our salvation.

Now we, of course, are not God. Our ministry is at best a witness to Christ's ministry. In our efforts to pass on the gift, we may indeed sometimes experience soul-testing depletion and loss. Nevertheless, Paul gives a promise to the Corinthians and to us. Did you notice that Paul says that in giving to those in need, there arises a "fair balance" in the act of ministry? Here are Paul's words: "I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance."

What I understand Paul to be saying here is something like this. If we take part in the divine economy of grace by sharing our riches, the riches of the gospel, and the riches of our resources placed in the service of Christ, the result, far from depletion, may well be the discovery of being newly and wondrously enriched. In giving, we may often discover that we receive more than we gave. Neither Paul nor I can guarantee that it will be so for you in all your acts of ministry. I can only testify that this was often Paul's own experience and the experience of countless other disciples of Christ through the centuries. It has also been my own experience at Princeton Seminary. I have seldom felt depleted by giving the best I could to my students, even over many years. On the contrary, though they may not know it, they have always given me as much as and more than I gave them, not because of some contract between us but because that is the miracle of God's economy of grace in which the gift given is freely given to others.

Christian ministry does not operate according to the logic of depletion or according to the logic of giving only that which we do not really need. It works by the logic of the excellence of God's grace and the excellence of ministry that it funds. According to Paul's doctrine of fair balance, the poor

of Jerusalem in his time, and the poor of the earth now, are not the objects of our splendid charity. Charity in the conventional sense of the word assumes that others need us; we do not need them. But this is all wrong according to Paul's doctrine of "fair balance." The stranger in our midst is not to be seen as someone for whom we can do something but who has nothing to offer us in return. The marginalized people, the homeless, the committed gay couple, the newly arrived immigrant family—they are not charitable cases to be included in our company because our material wealth is so great and we are so rich in righteousness that we can absorb a few who do not quite meet our standards. Rather, they are sisters and brothers without whom we and our company are impoverished. "It is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need . . ." A generous church engaging in excellent ministry opens its doors and its heart to the stranger, the outcast, the other—and discovers that it was terribly poor without them.

The excellence of ministry always begins with the indescribable gift, the unsurpassable grace, the excellency of the Lord Jesus Christ who, though rich, became poor that we, being poor, might become rich. That is the *gift given*.

And a ministry of excellence continues when we share the wealth of Christ and his gospel with others. That is the *gift to be given*. So don't stop now. Complete what you have started so well. Pass on the gift freely, eagerly, and joyously. An excellent ministry remains ever open to the surprising discovery that those with whom we are called to share the riches of the gospel turn out to have something precious to give to us—something that we did not even know we needed.

Princeton Seminary class of 2007, if you look first to Christ and his gift, if you eagerly wish to pass it on, and if you are ready to receive a gift that the stranger and the poor are waiting to give you, then what the apostle says of his Corinthian friends can, happily, also be said of you: "You excel in everything . . ." May God bless you and grant you a ministry that bears faithful witness to the excellence of the free gift of God in Jesus Christ. Amen.



# Kingdom Come: The Trinity and Politics

by KATHRYN E. TANNER

*This lecture was presented on March 21, 2007, in the Seminary's Mackay Campus Center by Dr. Kathryn E. Tanner as part of the Princeton Theological Seminary's annual Warfield Lecture series. Dr. Tanner received her doctorate from Yale University and since 1994 has been on the faculty of the University of Chicago Divinity School, where she is the Dorothy Grant Maclear Professor of Theology. She is the author of some forty articles and five books, including Economy of Grace (2005).*

In contemporary theology, the Trinity is often enlisted to support particular kinds of human community—say, egalitarian, inclusive communities, in which differences are respected—or to counter modern individualism by greater respect for the way persons are shaped by community. What the Trinity is like is thought to establish how human societies should be organized; the Trinity is thought to be the best indicator of the proper relationship between individuals and their community; and so on. Jürgen Moltmann, John Zizioulas, Miroslav Volf, Leonardo Boff, and Catherine LaCugna are all important names in this regard.<sup>1</sup>

Although theological judgments here seem quite simple—for example, if the persons of the Trinity are equal to one another, then human beings should be too—figuring out the sociopolitical lessons conveyed by the Trinity is fraught with complexities and perils. I systematically explore these complexities and perils here and conclude that it would be best to steer attention away from the Trinity when trying to determine the proper character of human relations in Christian terms. Christology, I suggest, is the better avenue to help Christians make sociopolitical judgments.

## INFLATED CLAIMS FOR THE TRINITY

My first caveat concerns inflated claims made for the concept of trinity in contemporary political theology. Many contemporary theologies overestimate the progressive political potential of the concept of trinity. Monotheism, it is alleged, supports monolithic identities and authoritarian forms of

<sup>1</sup> See especially Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991); John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993); Miroslav Volf, "The Trinity is Our Social Program": The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement," *Modern Theology* 14:3 (1998): 403–23; Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988); and Catherine LaCugna, *God For Us* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

government in which power is held exclusively by a single leader or group. An internally diverse triune God, in which persons share equally with one another, avoids these dangers, so the story goes.<sup>2</sup>

Overlooked in such a simple contrast between the political implications of monotheism and trinitarianism are the complexities of such theological claims (can monotheism and trinitarianism, for example, be this easily distinguished?), their fluidity of sense (can't monotheism or trinitarianism mean many different things?), and the possible variety of the political purposes that each might serve. To limit myself to the last consideration for the moment: monotheism need not have totally negative political implications. Of course it can suggest rule by one: one God, one lord—meaning one human lord. But monotheism can also suggest (particularly when understood to deny that divinity is a general category of things) that no person shares in divinity and therefore that no person can stand in as God's representative: "no lord but God."

Trinitarianism, moreover, is not often—to say the least—historically associated with egalitarian politics and respect for diversity within community. Trinitarian thinking arose in tandem with Christian support for an increasingly centralized Roman imperial rule, once Christianity became the state religion under the Emperor Constantine. Indeed, the major theological arguments in favor of imperial rule were not at all obviously monotheistic but presumed a diversity of divine principles or powers. Thus, in probably the most famous of these arguments, the "Oration in Praise of the Emperor Constantine," Eusebius states that the emperor has near absolute authority to govern the whole known human world as the agent and representative of the Word—a second divine principle—who rules the cosmos from on high with the supreme God's approval.<sup>3</sup>

Behind this poor historical showing lies the ambiguous sociopolitical potential of trinitarian theology itself. Many aspects of classical trinitarianism seem at least politically awkward on their face. Contrary to respect for difference, for example, divine persons are equal to one another because in some very strong sense they are the same. Short of tritheism, it is difficult to argue that divine persons are different from one another in the way human persons properly are—able to go their separate ways, distinguished by their own particular projects and interests, never in exactly the same place at the

<sup>2</sup> See Erik Peterson, *Der Monotheismus als Politisches Problem* (Leipzig: Jakob Hegner, 1935); Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 192–202; and Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 20–24.

<sup>3</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, "Oration in Praise of the Emperor Constantine," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. E. Richardson (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1890).

same time, distinct individuals sharing a common humanity in a general sense but not the same single humanity in the way that divine persons are the same one and indivisible divine being or substance, and so on. Taken as an indication of proper human sociability, here, it seems, is humanity subsumed by community with others. (Perhaps for this reason most advocates of a trinitarian social or political program err, to my mind, in the direction of a very strong communitarianism—that is much of the point of looking to the Trinity for social guidance.)

The common theological view that divine persons are constituted by their relations, along with the idea of their indivisibility in being and act, is simply hard to square with a politics that would like to foster the agency of persons traditionally effaced in relations with dominant members of society—women, racial or ethnic minorities, those overidentified with social roles in which their own needs and wants are given short shrift. Moreover, the order among divine persons, no matter how complex, tends to differentiate the persons by their unsubstitutable functions or places. The Holy Spirit, for example, has to go third in the liturgically favored, biblically derived formula of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The order among divine persons is therefore ripe for justification of human hierarchy. It easily supports fixed social roles and the idea that people are equal despite the disparity of their assignment to such roles.

The turn to the economic trinity—the Trinity's working for us in the world as the New Testament recounts that—is no help on this score, although many politically progressive trinitarian theologians seem to think it is. New Testament accounts of Jesus' relations with the one he calls Father are much more subordinationalist in flavor than accounts of the so-called immanent Trinity usually are: Jesus prays to the Father, subordinates his will to the Father, defers to the Father, seems ignorant on occasion of what only the Father knows, etc. (See, for example, John 14:28, Mark 13:32, Mark 10:18, Luke 18:18, and Matthew 19:16.) This sort of hierarchical relation between Son and Father, a relationship of inferior to superior, very obviously suggests the propriety of human hierarchy.

Finally, the inclusion of gendered imagery in classical characterizations of the relationships among the persons of the Trinity themselves and in their workings for the world has enormously problematic social and political ramifications. The pervasive Father-Son language of the New Testament in particular always holds the potential for rendering women as second-class citizens of the church or effacing their contributions altogether. Granted, Father-Son language is always given a quite limited theological rationale in classical trinitarian theology. The point is specifically not to import gender

into God—that is quite explicitly denied: “the divine is neither male nor female (for how could such a thing be contemplated in divinity . . . ?)”<sup>4</sup> The significance of the imagery is quite often limited simply to the idea that the one comes from the other and is of the very same substance with it—equal to it and not other than it. The intent is to distinguish the second person from a creature that also comes from God but is not equal to God. “Making” language therefore trumps “kinship” language when the Father’s relations with the world are at issue: the Father does not act exactly like a father in creating the world; the Father makes the world and does not beget it from his own substance. The gendered imagery in classical trinitarianism is always played off, moreover, against other forms of biblical imagery of a quite impersonal sort—light and water imagery, for example. Paired with these other images, therefore, the meaning of Father-Son imagery is often quite abstract, not specific to its gendered character. No single set of biblical images, furthermore, is privileged; they mutually modify one another in their theological import.<sup>5</sup> For example, light imagery is usually considered far better than Father-Son imagery in conveying the inseparable, indivisible character of the two. But whatever the theological intent, the rhetorical punch of the language in practice is another thing altogether, and nothing erases the sorry history in which the importance of such language has been magnified all out of proportion, in defiance of these quite circumscribed understandings of its theological point.

Granted too is that in classical trinitarian thinking, this is a Father who acts like a mother: he births or begets the Son. The term used to sum up the activity remains gendered male (probably, for one reason, because “father” is the dominant gendered term in the New Testament), but the activity itself seems much more in keeping with what only women can do—give birth. Notwithstanding the ancient biological theory in which the father is responsible for the substance of the child—the mother being a mere container for what the father contributes—what is of theological interest here is the way the Son issues immediately out of the Father like a child being birthed from its mother. Birth as the primary metaphor for developing whatever the Father is doing in relation to the Son is therefore quite strong—for example,

<sup>4</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, “Commentary on the Song of Songs,” cited by Verna Harrison, “Male and Female in Cappadocian Theology,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 41 (1990): 441; see also Gregory Nazianzen, “Fifth Theological Oration” (31.7), cited and discussed by Harrison, “Male and Female,” 456–57.

<sup>5</sup> For a clear expression of this principle, see Gregory of Nyssa, “Against Eunomius,” bk. 8, secs. 4–5, in Schaff and Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, trans. W. Moore and H. A. Wilson (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1893), 204–10.



in Hilary.<sup>6</sup> One might even say, following Psalm 120.3, as Hilary does, that the Son is begotten of the Father's womb.<sup>7</sup> And Jesus' mother, Mary, an actual woman, consequently becomes a prime analogy, since her birthing, like the Father's birthing of the Son, happens in the absence of any contribution by a sexual partner: the Son—the second person of the Trinity—has only a Father in the way the Son incarnate had only a mother.<sup>8</sup>

This sort of gender-bending use of imagery associated with both sexes—a Father with a womb—might very well present the best hope for avoiding the theological reinforcement of male privilege. Gendered imagery is “exceeded” in a “baffling of gender literalism.”<sup>9</sup> “Roles are reversed, fused, inverted: no one is simply who they seem to be. More accurately, everyone is *more than* they seem to be. . . . The Father and the Spirit are more than one gender can convey.”<sup>10</sup> Nothing, however, stops talk of a Father with a womb from simply erasing the contribution of real women by usurping their place: a man can do everything now! The genders are not being bent here in a strictly reciprocal way. The Father is not simply more than any one gender—male or female—can convey but is already as Father everything that the other gender ordinarily suggests. The divine Father may act in the way a human mother does, and a human mother—Mary—may give birth in a close parallel to the way the divine Father gives rise to the Son. But the genders are still clearly distinguished by ranking them across the division of human and divine. Women generally, and Mary in particular, may be privileged over men as the closest analogue on the human plane to divine generation, but they are nevertheless bested on a divine level by what only the Father is said to do. Quite commonly, moreover, the use of both paternal and maternal language merely reinforces gender stereotyping. The Father is also a mother because he is nurturing and compassionate and slow to anger, following, for example, Isaiah 49:15; 66:13.<sup>11</sup>

One might try to avoid gendered imagery altogether, but even when absolutely equal trinitarian persons of unassigned gender are made the basis for political conclusions, the essential relatedness of those persons easily leads

<sup>6</sup> See Hilary of Poitiers, “On the Trinity,” bk. 6, secs. 9 and 35; bk. 9, sec. 36, in Schaff and Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 9, trans. E. W. Watson and L. Pullan (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), 100, 111, 167.

<sup>7</sup> Hilary, “On the Trinity,” bk. 12, sec. 8, 219–20.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 50, 231.

<sup>9</sup> Janet Martin Soskice, “Trinity and Feminism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 146.

<sup>10</sup> Susan Ashbrook Harvey, “Feminine Imagery for the Divine: The Holy Spirit, the Odes of Solomon, and Early Syriac Tradition,” *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 37: 2–3 (1993): 114.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 171.

to heterosexism. The importance of differences between male and female for the identity of human persons can simply be presumed and substituted within a trinitarian account of the essential relatedness of persons to suggest that the identity of a woman depends on her relationship to a male counterpart.<sup>12</sup>

Clearly, then, trinitarianism can be every bit as socially and politically dangerous as monotheism. Everything depends on how that trinitarianism (or monotheism) is understood and applied. The only trinitarianism that is clearly more politically progressive than (some forms of) monotheism is trinitarianism within a very specific range of interpretations and modes of application. Those lauding the political merits of trinitarianism over strict monotheism eventually make clear that this holds only for trinitarianism when *properly* understood and employed—in other words, for the sort of trinitarianism they are actively trying to construct. What these theologians are trying to do, indeed, is systematically modify as many of the politically problematic aspects of classical trinitarianism as they can.

Thus, Moltmann and Volf argue that the persons of the Trinity are not simply constituted by their relations without remainder.<sup>13</sup> Following Moltmann, politically progressive trinitarian theologians such as Leonardo Boff downplay irreversible orders among the trinitarian persons in favor of perfectly reciprocal perichoretic relations—relations of indwelling—among them: the Father is in the Son just as the Son is in the Father, etc. It is these perichoretic relations that do the heavy lifting. The reversibility of those relations, rather than identity of substance, is what accounts for the *equality* of the persons, and they come to replace politically problematic alternatives, such as identity of substance, as the basis for the Trinity's *unity*.<sup>14</sup>

The theological merits of these politically progressive theologies hinge on the strength of the arguments for such theological moves. One argument in their favor is simply the fact that these moves support a progressive politics, and I have no interest in denying the importance of that. But this political consideration hardly overrides the many problematic features of the sort of trinitarianism typically advanced. Inexplicably, to my mind, for example, no

<sup>12</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 187. Volf moves illegitimately here from a necessity of conceptual reference (from the fact that one term is defined with reference to another) to a necessary relation of fact (women must actually be related to men, for example, married to them, in order to be themselves). The logical slippage involved becomes readily apparent when one considers other cases where terms are defined with reference to one another but where it would be absurd to infer a requirement of actual intertwined lives of intimacy: heterosexuality, for example, develops as a concept in relation to homosexuality, and so on.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Volf, "The Trinity," 410; and Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 172–74.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 84; and Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 134.

one has adequately addressed how the heavy load that perfectly reciprocal perichoresis carries in these theologies is compatible with their equally strong emphasis on the biblical economy, in which Jesus seems clearly to be acting in a nonmutual relation of subordination to the Father (for example, the Son prays to the Father, but the Father does not pray to the Son; the Son does the will of the Father, but the Father does not do the will of the Son, etc). In other words, in the biblical narration, not all the relations among the persons of the Trinity seem even close to being reciprocal, in which the persons can change places with one another, and little explanation is offered for this—the problem is, for the most part, just ignored.<sup>15</sup>

The very heavy emphasis on perfectly reciprocal relations among the members of the Trinity and severe downplaying of any idea of their fixed positions in an order (for example, the persons are often now said to be all equally origins of one another, even if they are always properly named in the order Father, Son, and Holy Spirit<sup>16</sup>) seem, moreover, hard to reconcile with the usual ways of making clear that persons are distinct from one another. The most common way, in the history of theology, is to talk about their being related to one another in some noninterchangeable way—the Father is related to the Son as the one begetting him, but in doing so, he is specifically the Father and not the Son—and to make a distinction on that basis between communicable or shareable properties (what all the persons exhibit *qua* divine) and incommunicable ones (when the Father gives the Son everything in begetting him that does not include the character of being Father).<sup>17</sup> Most politically progressive theologies simply start from the assumption of distinct persons, taking this for granted as a feature of the biblical witness, and go on to talk about the unity of the Trinity on that basis—as a function of how closely related the persons are to one another. But if the relationships they have with one another allow for no distinctions among them, it is hard to see how such a starting assumption helps. Their relations work to undercut the distinctiveness of the persons that is simply assumed at the start, and there is no remaining way to shore it up.

Other moves made by politically progressive trinitarian theologians suggest, to the contrary, that the persons of the Trinity are *too* distinct from one another. Moltmann, for example, maintains that the existence of the persons of the Trinity is distinct from their relations.<sup>18</sup> It is simply impossible,

<sup>15</sup> See Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 138–39, where every biblically narrated relationship among the persons is said to involve their being in one another.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 88–89, for an explicit rejection of the latter.

<sup>18</sup> Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 172.

Moltmann maintains, for persons to be their relations, in the way an Augustinian or Thomistic account of trinitarian persons as subsistent relations would have it. But this is simply to give the trinitarian term "person" (a rather ill-defined placeholder for whatever there might be three of in the Trinity) the modern sense of "human person" and then insist on taking it quite literally. It is impossible for human beings to enter into relationships unless the persons already exist; we have to exist before we can relate to other people. Or, to make the distinction between existence and manner of existence perhaps more properly (as Moltmann himself does in a later article), we can be said to exist because of certain relationships—in virtue, say, of being born of a particular mother and father—whatever the characters we come to have by way of subsequent ones.<sup>19</sup> But why assume any of this must hold true for divine persons?

Quite a bit more argument than Moltmann offers would be necessary to justify the use of a modern sense of "person" here with implications diverging so markedly from previous uses of personal language in trinitarian theology. Personal terms have long been employed to talk about the persons of the Trinity—Father and Son are the prime examples. But (as Boff, with respect to Moltmann, properly points out in support of the use of the modern sense of person to discuss the three) that was to suggest the very constitution of such persons in and through their relations with one another—there is no Father without this Son and no Son without this Father.<sup>20</sup> The point was to highlight their essential or constitutive relationality; personal language was certainly not used to distinguish the existence of a person of the Trinity from the way it exists in relation to another. Taken this literally, the argument clearly smacks of tritheism. The persons of the Trinity become very much like human persons, and therefore the Trinity itself becomes a collection—tightly interwoven to be sure—of distinct persons on a very close—too close—analogy to a society of human persons.

#### FROM GOD TO HUMANS

No matter how close the similarities between human and divine persons, differences always remain. God is not us, and this sets up the major problem for theologies that want to base conclusions about human relationships on the Trinity. The chief complication is how to move from a discussion of God

<sup>19</sup> Juergen Moltmann, "Theological Proposals towards a Resolution of the *Filioque* Controversy," in *Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ*, ed. Luke Vischer (London: SPCK, 1981), 164–73.

<sup>20</sup> Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 88–89, 115–16.



to a discussion of human relationships, given those differences.<sup>21</sup> How exactly, in short, does a description of the Trinity apply to us? Three specific problems arise here.

First of all, the differences between God and us suggest that we do not clearly understand what we mean when using ordinary language to speak of the Trinity. What the concept of trinity is saying about human relations becomes unclear because the meaning of the terms used to talk about the Trinity is unclear. Divine persons are equal to one another but in what sense? The persons are "in" one another, but what does "in" mean here? Divine persons are distinguished from one another by the character of their relations, but who understands exactly what that character is? As Hilary says: "Begetting is the secret of the Father and the Son. If anyone is convinced of the weakness of his intelligence through failing to understand this mystery . . . he will undoubtedly be even more downcast to learn that I am in the same state of ignorance."<sup>22</sup> What indeed does even the language of "person" suggest if, with Augustine, we have to say that "the formula three persons was coined, not in order to give a complete explanation by means of it, but in order that we might not be obliged to remain silent."<sup>23</sup> Because God is not very comprehensible to us, and certainly not fully so, discussion of the Trinity, all by itself, seems of little help in better understanding human relationships: what is difficult to understand—the proper character of human society—is explicated with reference to what is surely only more obscure—the character of divine community.

The second problem is that much of what is said about the Trinity simply does not seem directly applicable to humans. The differences between God and humans stand in the way. Many of these differences that prevent a direct application have to do with the essential finitude of human beings. Human society could therefore take on the very character of the Trinity in these respects in which they differ only if people were no longer human.

So, for example, it seems bound up with their essential finitude that human persons can only metaphorically be in one another, if that means having overlapping subjectivities in the way the persons of the Trinity do.<sup>24</sup> Because all the other members of the Trinity are in that person, when one person of

<sup>21</sup> See Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 191–200; and Volf, "The Trinity," 403–7.

<sup>22</sup> Hilary, "On the Trinity," bk. 2, sec. 9, 55, following the more felicitous translation in Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 174.

<sup>23</sup> Augustine, "On the Trinity," bk. 5, chap. 9, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 92, following the more felicitous translation in Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 143.

<sup>24</sup> Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 209, 211.

the Trinity acts the others are necessarily acting, too. Clearly this does not hold for human persons: I may enter empathetically into the one I love, but that does not mean I act when my beloved does.

Divine persons, moreover, seem much more relational than human beings. Human persons can never be as closely tied to their relations with others as persons in the Trinity are commonly thought to be—and that is the case even were one to think (as I do not) that it is proper to make a real distinction between the existence and character of trinitarian persons.<sup>25</sup> Thus, it would be very unusual to suggest that trinitarian persons temporally precede the relations among themselves that make them what they are, in the way this happens in human relations. Human beings have no character to begin with, as that is decisively shaped by what happens to them later; I therefore exist prior to those relationships with duplicitous significant others, for example, that end up making me a bitter, distrustful old person.

Character in human beings, moreover, is not as bound up with actual relations with others. I can be defined by certain general relational capacities before, and whatever the way in which, these capacities are actualized in my relationships. For example, my character might be constituted by the tendency to be suspicious before, and whether or not, my relations with others give me good grounds to be that way. For much the same reasons, the character formed in me by virtue of my relations with others remains even when the relations that gave rise to it end: my character remains despite, for example, the deaths of the people and communities who have contributed most to it. In contrast, the relational characteristics of trinitarian persons are much more tightly a function of actual relationships: the Father, for example, is not defined as someone with the general capacity to beget someone or other but as the Father who is and remains such only in begetting this Son.<sup>26</sup>

The character of a human person, furthermore, takes different forms in the course of relations with different people. I always have the capacity to be more or other than I am right now. I have the capacity, for example, to be enormously engaging and incredibly funny (unlike now) as well as the capacity to be hateful when made the brunt of ridicule. To know a human person in her relations with you, therefore, is to know her only incompletely. Theologians generally do not want to say anything quite like that of the Trinity: trinitarian persons are fully themselves in their relations with one

<sup>25</sup> See Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 115, 119, 128, 134–35, 140, 207–208.

<sup>26</sup> See Gilles Emery, “Essentialism or Personalism in the Treatise on God in Saint Thomas Aquinas?” *The Thomist* 64 (2000): 551–53.

another and with us; trinitarian persons are not in themselves, for example, other than the persons they show themselves to be to us.

Despite their intense relationality, moreover, trinitarian persons remain irreducibly distinct from one another in ways that human beings cannot imitate. Father and Son remain absolutely different from each other in the Trinity, so to speak, because, unlike the case of human fathers and sons, here the Father has never been a Son—the Father is always Father—and the Son never becomes a Father—the Son is always Son. The terms father and son in the Trinity do not, in short, indicate general capacities, which a variety of individuals might exhibit, but are person-defining properties. In the human case, I am different from my mother in that I am my mother's daughter, but I can also become like my mother by becoming the mother of a daughter myself. In being different from my mother, therefore, I am not absolutely different from her. The human relations that distinguish people never simply define them and therefore one can lose the way one has been identified in virtue of those relations (one's identity as a daughter, say, once one's mother has been dead for thirty years) and take on others (the identity of a mother to one's own daughter) while remaining oneself. But persons of the Trinity are too tied to their specific relationship, for example, of being Father and Son, to do this. They are too absolutely what they are—Son or Father—and too absolutely distinct from each other in such a relationship for that to be possible.

Indeed, in the Trinity, relations of tremendous intensity never threaten the individuality of the persons in the way relations like that threaten to blur the identities of human beings. Unlike the case of trinitarian persons, the finitude of humans seems to require the policing of boundaries between themselves and others—a finitude that breaks off relationships. I will never be my own person unless I can break away from the incredibly intense relationship I have with my mother. In the Trinity, to the contrary, the persons are absolutely different from one another in the very intensity of the relationships they have with one another. It is because the relationship is so intense for them both, so to speak, that the Father can only be a Father and the Son only a Son.

Finally, human finitude also seems to entail that humans give of themselves so that others may gain in ways that often bring loss to themselves. In contrast, the perfect equality of trinitarian persons is usually thought to involve giving without loss and receiving without increase. The first person of the Trinity does not give all of itself to the second at any cost to itself, and the second does not receive from the first what is not already its own.

One could argue, as I have done elsewhere, that loss in giving to others on the human plane is a function of a world in disarray and not a necessary

consequence of simple finitude.<sup>27</sup> It is possible in principle for the world to be arranged in ways that make giving to others a benefit to oneself. But this simply brings us to the third problem. Direct translation of the concept of trinity into a social program is problematic because, unlike the peaceful and perfectly loving mutuality of the Trinity, human society is full of suffering, conflict, and sin. Turned into a recommendation for social relations, the concept of trinity seems unrealistic, hopelessly naive, and, for that reason, perhaps even politically dangerous. To a world of violent, corrupt, and selfish people, the concept of trinity seems to offer only the feeble plaint, "Why can't we all just get along?"

So how is the gap between the Trinity and sinful, finite human persons to be bridged in ways that allow us to see its implications for human community? One strategy for bridging the gap is, when envisioning human society, to supplement the move down from the concept of trinity with a move up, from below.<sup>28</sup> In other words, given what one knows about human beings, one can figure out the extent to which human relations might imitate trinitarian ones. The ideals of trinity tell us what ideal human relations should be. The understanding of humans as creatures and sinners tells us what we can expect in our approximation of the ideal but does not add anything to what we already know about the real possibilities for human community, given our human limits and failings.

The other major strategy for closing the gap looks to the economic Trinity for help.<sup>29</sup> One does not have to bring an account of the ideals of trinity together with what one knows about the limits of human life to figure out how human relationships could come to approximate trinitarian ones. The economic Trinity—how the Trinity acts in saving us—makes that clear, because what one finds in the economic Trinity itself is the ideals of trinity brought closer to what humans are capable of doing. For example, in the economy the Trinity appears as a dialogical fellowship of love and mutual service between Jesus and the one he calls Father—the kind of relationship that human beings could imitate because it is in keeping with their finitude—in contrast, say, to perfectly mutual indwelling or perichoresis.

The same goes for sin. The economic Trinity is the Trinity entering a world of sin and death. Apart from any theological speculation, therefore, the economic Trinity itself gives a clue to how trinitarian relations should be lived out in a world of sin. For example, those relations have the broken and

<sup>27</sup> See Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 200; and Volf, "The Trinity," 405–6.

<sup>29</sup> See Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*; and LaCugna, *God for Us*.



sorrowful character of a Father losing his own Son by way of a death undergone for the sake of others.

The same sort of problem that beset the previous strategy resurfaces here, however. The closer trinitarian relations seem to human ones in the economy, the less the concept of trinity seems to offer advice about how to move beyond what we already expect of human life, given human limits and failings. The concept of trinity simply confirms what we already know and solidifies our chastened hopes under the circumstances. We all have some sense of what dialogical relations of loving fellowship are like. We all know about the way death severs relationships and about how obedience to a good cause often comes at the price of sacrifice in troubled times. And the concept of trinity offers us nothing more.

#### DO WE MODEL OURSELVES ON THE TRINITY OR PARTICIPATE IN IT?

My own strategy for closing the gap also looks to what the concept of trinity is doing for us—what is happening in the life of Christ, in short—to answer the question of how the concept of trinity applies to human life. The Trinity itself enters our world to close the gap, but not (as the previous strategy suggested) by presenting us with a form of the Trinity we can imitate; the Trinity does not close the gap by making itself over in a human image of community that we can imitate—dialogical fellowship, say. Instead, in Christ the Trinity enters our world to work over human life in its image through the incorporation of the human within the divine trinitarian life. By joining us to those relations, Christ gives us the very relations of Father, Son, and Spirit for our own. By becoming incarnate, the second person of the Trinity takes the humanity joined to it into its own relations with Father and Spirit, and therefore in Christ we are shown what the Trinity looks like when it includes the human and what humanity looks like when it is included in the Trinity's own movements—the character of a human life with others when it takes a trinitarian form, as that is displayed in Jesus' own human life.

The gap between divine and human is not closed here by making the two similar to each other but by joining the two very different things—humanity and divinity, which remain very different things—into one via Christ, via incarnation. Trinitarian relations need not be like human relations in order for humans to be taken up in this way into them, and therefore the problematic trade-off mentioned earlier is avoided. The more trinitarian relations seem close in character to human ones (and therefore relations that human beings could imitate), the less the concept of trinity tells you anything you did not already know about them. Gone too is the basis for hope in the idea that

trinitarian relations are sufficiently close to human ones to be imitated by us. Now hope is fueled by how *different* the trinitarian relations, in which we are to be incorporated, are from anything with which they are familiar under the constraints of finitude and sin. The difference between the Trinity and us now holds out hope for a radical improvement of the human condition. The Trinity is not brought down to our level as a model for us to imitate; our hope is that we might one day be raised up to its level.

Finitude is no longer a problem either. Finitude does not make trinitarian relations inaccessible to us, because human relations come to image trinitarian ones as they are swept up into them and not as they become like them in and of themselves. Human relations need not somehow become more than human themselves in order, thereby, to approximate the Trinity. Human relations, which remain fully human, only image the Trinity as they are joined up with its own life. Humans do not attain the heights of trinitarian relations by reproducing them in and of themselves, by mimicking them, in other words, but by being taken up into them as the very creatures they are. They come to share a divine form of existence, not their own by nature, by becoming attached to it.

The usual strategy of looking to the economy—the Trinity at work in the world—seems stuck on the idea that the Trinity appears to us in the economy as a model for our imitation because it fails to follow the economic workings of the Trinity all the way down to their impact on us. In other words, that strategy stops with relations among trinitarian persons in the economy—for example, the Son incarnate doing the will of the Father—and makes them a model for human ones rather than following through on what the economy of the Trinity itself is suggesting about human relations. Jesus' life, in short, exhibits not just the sort of relations that humans, in the image of the Son, are to have with Father and Spirit—relations of worshipful dedication to the Father's mission, empowered by the Spirit—but, in his relations with other people, Jesus also shows how those relations with Father and Spirit are to work themselves out in community with other people. If one wants to know how a trinitarian life impacts one's relations with other people, this second part of the story is very obviously the place to look: Jesus' relations with other people constitute the sort of human relations that the economy of the Trinity itself specifies; Jesus' way of life toward other people as we share in it *is* the trinitarian form of human social life.

It is not at all clear, however, that Jesus' relations with other people are trinitarian by following the trinitarian pattern of his relations with Father and Spirit. The human being Jesus relates to Father and Spirit in much the way the second person of the Trinity does. Because Jesus *is* the second person of

the Trinity, he retains as a human being the same sort of relations with Father and Spirit that he has as the second person of the Trinity. This is a very direct translation of trinitarian relations into a human form. But none of that is true for Jesus' relations with other people; they are simply not the direct translation of trinitarian relations into a human form in the same way.

Indeed, if one takes into account the whole story of the economy—both parts of it—and avoids isolated attention to what is narrated about the relationships among the trinitarian persons, it is not at all apparent that the one side establishes the pattern for the other: Jesus' relations with Father and Spirit do not appear in any obvious way to be the model for his relations with other human beings in the story. Rather than establish the pattern for human relationships, Jesus' relations with Father and Spirit are—quite obviously—the sort of relations that it is appropriate for humans to have with Father and Spirit. One is to worship the Father following the precedent of Jesus' own prayers, carry out the will of the Father as human beings filled up with and empowered by the Holy Spirit as Jesus was, which means working for the well-being of others as Jesus did, and so on. But why think one will relate to other humans in the process in anything like the way one is relating here to Father and Spirit?

Let me make the same rather obvious point in light of the way we are incorporated within the trinitarian life by being joined to Christ. When humans are incorporated into the Trinity through Christ, different people are not spread out across the Trinity to take on its pattern. Instead, they all enter at the same point, all become identified with the same trinitarian person—members of the one Son, sons by the grace of the Holy Spirit—and they move as a whole, as one body, along with the second person of the Trinity in its movements within the dynamic life of the Trinity. The concept of trinity does not in any obvious way, therefore, establish the internal structure of human community, the unity of the Trinity being what makes human society one, the diversity of the persons establishing its internal complexity. Instead, the one divine Son and the one divine Spirit are what make human society one. We are one, as the Pauline texts suggest, because we all have the same Spirit and because we are all members of the one Son. And the diversity of this human community is internal to the one Spirit and one Son, so to speak; the diversity is a diversity of gifts of the Spirit and of that one Son's bodily members. Rather than establishing the pattern of unity and diversity in human community, the Trinity establishes more what that one united but diverse body of spirit-filled sons by grace does and how it moves. The whole body of Christians moves together in the way any single human being, united to Christ's own life, follows a trinitarian dynamic.

There are New Testament passages, of course, that suggest that the unity between Son and Father is what unity in human community is to be like. Jesus asks his Father "that they may be one as we are one" (John 17: 11, 22). Rather than read these passages as some brief for understanding the unity of human persons or an analogy with unity among persons of the Trinity, one can take them simply as indicating the centrality of Christ and of his relations with the Father as it should be in our relations with the Father. That is, Christ is one with the Father, perfectly doing the Father's will, and we should all be one by being one with the Father as Jesus is—united in doing the Father's will in the way Jesus does it.

The way Jesus images in a human form the relations among Father, Son, and Spirit has an effect, of course, on his relations with other people: Jesus relates to other people in highly unusual ways, which have everything to do with his relations to Father and Spirit. The way the persons of the Trinity relate to one another over the course of Jesus' life—relations among the divine persons in which we are to share by being united with Christ in the Spirit—bring with them changed relations among human beings. The Son is sent by the Father into the world, and empowered by the Spirit, to carry out a mission that brings him into relationship with us. A life empowered by the Spirit in service to the mission of the Father for the world means that Jesus is with and for us and that we, in turn, are to be with and for one another, in the way that mission specifies.

The character of that mission, as Jesus' own way of life makes clear, is to inaugurate a life-brimming, spirit-filled community of human beings akin to Jesus in their relations with God. The mission means bringing in the kingdom or new community that accords with Jesus' own healing, reconciling, and life-giving relations with others. This way of being is what the trinitarian relations as they show themselves in the economy—Jesus' praying to the Father and serving the will of the Father in the power of the Spirit—amount to in human relational terms. Jesus' relations with Father and Spirit make his whole life one of worshipful, praise-filled, faithful service to the Father's mission of bringing in the kingdom; that is to be the character of our lives too, both in and out of church, as we come to share Jesus' life. We are to participate in the Father's mission for the world, mediating the life-giving Spirit of Christ, through union with him. Glorified, worked over into Christ's image, so as to take on his shape in relations with other human beings, we are to form the citizens or members of a new kingdom or community with Christ as both the director and forerunner of the sort of new lives we are to lead together.



The question then becomes what the kingdom has to do with the Trinity that works to bring it about. To what extent is the kingdom, in other words, not just the consequence of a trinitarian life like Jesus' in relation to Father and Spirit—bound up, part and parcel of it for that reason—but also reflective of the Trinity's own character? A lot depends here on exactly what one thinks the kingdom is like. I would venture that the kingdom is like the Trinity in that both are supremely life affirming of all their members and organized to bring about the utmost flourishing of all. Both are paradigmatic instances of what I have called elsewhere a community of mutual fulfillment, in which the good of one becomes the good for all.<sup>30</sup> The Trinity is coming to us to give us the sort of life-giving relations of mutual flourishing that the Trinity itself enjoys.

There is an analogy, then, with the Trinity, but not a very specific one. What one gets out of the Trinity here for an understanding of the kingdom one might also find by treating any number of other theological topics—the incarnation, for example. The incarnation too—but in a significantly different manner from what one finds in the Trinity—sets up a kinship, in this case between humanity and divinity, a community of now mutual fulfillment in that the human is to benefit from what the divine already enjoys. In some ways, indeed, the incarnation is a better model for the sort of human community or kingdom to be set up: when every human being becomes one in Christ, this overrides, in a significant sense, forms of already established kinship that would otherwise keep people apart. This is an unnatural community, one might say, in much the way human and divinity in Christ are an unnatural community, made up of what is naturally disparate and dissimilar. More like the relationship between humanity and divinity in Christ than the Trinity, this is a community of previously diverse persons brought together only by something different from them that they all share—Christ.

<sup>30</sup> Tanner, *Economy of Grace*.

# The Church in Hungary and Central and Eastern Europe: Trends and Challenges

by ANNE-MARIE KOOL

*Dr. Anne-Marie Kool, who was a visiting scholar at Princeton Theological Seminary during the 2006–2007 academic year, delivered this lecture on March 6, 2007, in the Mackay Campus Center as part of a series titled “Trends and Challenges in Mission and Missiology in ‘Post-Communist’ Europe.” A native of the Netherlands, Dr. Kool is Professor of Missiology and Director of the Central and Eastern European Institute for Mission Studies at Károli Gáspár Reformed University in Budapest, Hungary, and head of the Department of Missiology at the Reformed Theological Academy in Pápa, Hungary. She is also the European representative on the executive committee of the International Association for Mission Studies.*

The churches in the “post-Communist” societies of Hungary and Central and Eastern Europe, now influenced by globalization, pluralism, and secularization, are facing increasingly complex challenges to their efforts to be witnesses of Jesus Christ in word and deed, resulting in a need for a greater emphasis on building bridges between the church and the world community. These bridges can be compared to the many bridges that cross the river Danube, the second largest river in Europe after the Volga. Extending for 1,770 miles on its way from the Black Forest to the Black Sea, the Danube flows through or forms a border with nine countries. I have previously discussed three trends and challenges dealing with the crisis between individual and community: the search for a new identity, a gradual shift toward partnership and cooperation, and collective and individualistic trends in the societies of post-Communist Europe. In this lecture, my focus will be on three trends and challenges of the community in its relationship to the world—truly a bridge-building effort.

## I. OTHERNESS AND RECONCILIATION

Speaking in Bucharest, Romania, in the late 1990s, Paul Wilson, a member of the executive committee of Christians Associated for Relationships with Eastern Europe (CAREE), told the following story.

I recall one of the first experiences I had in Romania at a WCC Roundtable in which representatives of the [ethnic Hungarian] Reformed Church, the [ethnic Romanian] Romanian Orthodox Church,

and the [ethnic German] Augsburg Confession branch of the Lutheran Church, the Anglican Church, and representatives of the Salvation Army were present [the latter two are not strictly linked to one ethnic group]. It was one of the first meetings of the ecumenical association of Romanian churches. They were not comfortable naming one of their own to be the moderator, so they depended upon foreigners, because they figured that we were impartial and could provide leadership that would be fair and open. So as the newest one there, I was asked to moderate. I did not think much about it. The meeting took place in a long room in a monastery north of Bucharest, with the WCC's Europe officer sitting next to me. Suddenly the two [Romanian] Orthodox from the seminary and two of the leaders of the [Hungarian] Reformed church got into a very heated argument about what had transpired during the Cold War, who had done what to whom, etc. They began talking over each other's voices, shouting at one another, and I looked down the table to the translators, who could not keep up with such simultaneous shouting. Then the WCC person nudged me to stop it. I responded, "Well, maybe this kind of discussion needs to find a place to be aired." So I tried to get them to control the speaking, and finally did get each to stop and wait for the other to finish, before they spoke in defense of their position."<sup>1</sup>

A similar incident took place in October 2006 at a study day on religion and ethnicity in Romania, held in the Netherlands, that included ethnic Hungarian Reformed seminary students and a Romanian Orthodox priest. Often these discussions deal with different interpretations of history that secure more or fewer historical rights for one or another ethnic group. It shows that even today, the tensions are very real.

The Hungarian missiologist János Pásztor considers extreme nationalism to be one of the greatest temptations and hindrances to a renewal in the church. He refers to Romania, with its significant Hungarian minority, and to Yugoslavia as the two countries where the most extreme forms of this can be witnessed.<sup>2</sup> As he states: "Unfortunately, this kind of extreme nationalism coupled with hatred, has found its way into our church [the RCH]." He then

<sup>1</sup> Paul Wilson, "Ministry in Eastern Europe from a National Council of Churches (USA) Perspective," *Religion in Eastern Europe* 20, no. 3 (2000). (Words in brackets are the author's.)

<sup>2</sup> János Pásztor, "What Does It Mean To Be a Missionary Church Today?" in *The Church in Reformed Perspective: A European Reflection. Report and Papers from a European Consultation of Reformed Theologians Held at the International Reformed Centre John Knox from January 9 to 13, 2002* (Geneva: Centre International Réformé John Knox, 2002), 93.

goes on to say that he considers these “racist tendencies” to be “the most harmful hindrances to our mission, which is to live the life and love of Christ in our society.”<sup>3</sup>

The problem of otherness, however, is broader than ethnic categories. It tends, according to Pásztor, “to regard anyone whose opinions differ from one’s own as an enemy,” which, according to him, is another characteristic of post-Communist Hungarian society and which can be found in the Reformed Church as well.<sup>4</sup> “Charismatics, fundamentalists, those working in ecumenical work, liberals etc. can be regarded as an enemy.”<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the categories of “otherness,” “the other,” “the rest,” “them,” “those,” etc. are applied not only to the Roma, Slovaks, Romanians, and Jews. From a Reformed perspective, a Catholic, a person from a rural vista, a city dweller, a poor or a rich man, etc.—any of these can be deemed “the other.” This attitude can be observed even in the tensions among Hungarian church districts, or, at the congregation level, with respect to church leaders. Clearly, then, there are serious tensions and divisions not only in Hungarian society but also in the churches, although it would be a fundamental mistake to generalize these tendencies. Thus, differences become the grounds for considering the other to be inferior rather than grounds for understanding differences as something to celebrate, something that reveals yet something else of the mystery of God present in the world.

Among the most central focal points of the volatile “otherness” issue in Central Europe are the Roma (Gypsies), who make up 7 percent of Hungary’s population (approximately 700,000 people). According to Isabel Fonseca, “the most dramatic change” for Central and Eastern European Roma since the revolutions of 1989 has been the “sharp escalation of hatred and violence” directed at them.<sup>6</sup> A detailed report on the socioeconomic situation of the Roma people in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania, issued by the United Nations Development Program, states: “the living conditions of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe are more characteristic of sub-Saharan countries such as Zimbabwe or Botswana than of Europe.”<sup>7</sup>

Ferenc Szűcs, professor of dogmatics at the Károli Reformed University in Budapest, has stated that efforts to reach out to the Roma may have a renewal

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 94, 96.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>6</sup> Isabel Fonseca, *Bury Me Standing: The Gypsies and Their Journey* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 140.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in: Burkhard Paetzold, “Mission among the Roma,” *Highlights of Worldwide Ministries* (Presbyterian Church USA) (Fall 2005), <http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/romania/roma.pdf> (accessed August 29, 2007).



effect on the church because they would force the church to reflect on issues of gospel and culture, especially on how to translate the gospel in a way that would relate to the mindset of the Roma, whose culture is so far from that of the Reformed Church. This effort, he said, would at least “stir up the dead-waters of our *volkskirche* (civil church).” He went on to say that he considers this “the greatest mission challenge,” because “if the churches do not involve themselves, this social bomb is going to go off right in our midst, and the consequences are unforeseeable.”<sup>8</sup>

Although some type of ministry to the Roma has been formally in place in the Reformed Church in Hungary since the 1970s, only in the last four years has the Roma mission received some official attention, mainly due to the catalyst role played by PCUSA’s regional liaison for Central and Eastern Europe, Burkhard Paetzold. An ecumenical forum on Roma issues also was recently initiated by the Reformed Church. One of the factors leading to this new initiative seemed to be the 2007 European Year of Equal Opportunities for All,<sup>9</sup> which focuses particularly on the Roma and offers extensive possibilities for grants.

The especially difficult and important challenge of changing the attitude and mentality of the majority (church) society still remains. An interesting initiative has been undertaken by Pax Romana Hungary in a program for Hungarian and Roma high school youth, which is designed to help them overcome their ethnic biases.

Eight years ago, Ezter Dani, an ordained pastor in the Reformed Church, initiated and implemented a leadership training program for Roma in the emerging Roma churches in western Ukraine. Her motivation was to help those suffering from prejudice and marginalization. As she explained, “Jesus broke boundaries of his time and touched those who are marginalized.”<sup>10</sup>

It is well known that Miroslav Volf has dealt extensively with the concept of otherness and ethnicity, dealing specifically with his own roots. He is of the opinion that otherness should be placed at the center of theological reflection. “The future of the whole world depends on how we deal with ethnic, religious and gender otherness.”<sup>11</sup> His response to otherness is a “theology of embrace.”

On the basis of his Central-East European experiences, Volf observes that there is a “disturbing *absence* of attempts to relate the core theological beliefs

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> See [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/eyeq/index.cfm?cat\\_id=EY](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/eyeq/index.cfm?cat_id=EY) (accessed August 29, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> Paetzold, “Mission among the Roma.”

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

about reconciliation to the shape of the church's social responsibility."<sup>12</sup> He also calls attention to the fact that evangelical and pietistic groups have forgotten about the importance of reconciliation between people because their faith has become a matter of individual relation between God and man. "Reconciliation has a theological and personal meaning, but no wider social meaning."<sup>13</sup> In other words, he says, the doctrine of reconciliation is reduced to "reconciliation of the soul with God." People are seen as sinners before God, and they are called to repent and to receive forgiveness and a new life in Christ. Volf goes on to say that "the fateful move comes" when this core belief is linked to "an almost exclusive emphasis on private morality conceived of as the ethical consequence of the reconciliation of a person with God and with a thoroughly apolitical stance based on the persuasion that the church and the state have distinct spheres of authority."<sup>14</sup>

As Central Europe is particularly imbued with social conflicts, this kind of approach will certainly not help the cause and will only hinder it, while, due to their identity in Christ, the Christian churches could have an important role in the process of reconciliation. As a result of the process outlined, Volf states, churches have no resources in situations of conflict. Instead, he says, "They find it difficult to help foster reconciliation."<sup>15</sup>

It is somewhat puzzling to me why Volf's theology of otherness and embrace does not have any traceable impact on post-Communist Europe. In his article "A 'Kingdom Paradigm' as Mission Response to a Post-War Multi-Religious Context," Fjodor Raychynets of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who writes from the same postwar context as Volf, speaks about the need to overcome the otherness syndrome by interreligious dialogue and pleads for a mission of "all-inclusivistic embrace." However, he does not even mention Volf by name.<sup>16</sup>

This puzzlement is shared by András Csepregi of the Lutheran Theological University in Budapest. In a review of the Hungarian edition of Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace*, Csepregi states that it was indeed an important book. However, he considers it remarkable that more than a year after the publication of the book, it still has not stirred the waters or become a theme in the public theological discussions. He says he did not see any references to it and

<sup>12</sup> Miroslav Volf, "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation," *Religion in Eastern Europe* 18, no. 3 (1998): 22.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>16</sup> Fjodor Raychynets, "A 'Kingdom Paradigm' As Mission Response to a Post-War Multi-Religious Context," in *Christian Presence and Witness among Muslims*, ed. Peter F. Penner (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2005), 161.

only one book review. He adds as an explanation: "But the book of Miroslav Volf also deals with us. I dare to run the risk: maybe therefore do we hardly speak about it, because it is directed at us and it speaks about us, and we are so touched by it, that we cannot talk about it with such an easiness, which in fact is made possible by this Hungarian translation of a book on a fashionable theme by a famous author."<sup>17</sup> Csepregi thus emphasizes that the topic Volf writes about is too sensitive in Hungary, which is probably true.

Another reason could be that Volf is considered so much an "other" that he is not accepted anymore in his own context. For Hungarian readers he might possibly be considered as "not Hungarian" and "not Reformed." It also could be that people think that while it's easy to write about such very difficult issues from a study in Yale, as a kind of fashionable theology, the reality in which we live is completely different. It's too far removed from everyday life. Whatever the reason, the everyday reality is that not much progress is made in the field of reconciliation. On a recent ecumenical missiological gathering in Hungary, we searched for case studies on reconciliation in the Hungarian context. We could not come up with any.<sup>18</sup>

Thus it seems that the problem of otherness is an "antimission" imperative that divides and hinders people from crossing cultural and ethnic barriers with the gospel. The reason is probably a feeling of being threatened in one's own identity. It seems to be a negative way to "uphold" one's own identity, by accusing others of what they have supposedly done wrong. When the Christian identity is reductionist, with reconciliation limited to one's own personal salvation, a way out is difficult. When church membership is primarily a cultural or ethnic issue—which is often the case—reconciliation is an empty concept, with no contents.

In the next section, I will discuss the factors and driving forces behind much of the missionary activity in post-Communist Europe.

## II. OUT OF OUR GHETTO, INTO THE WORLD

A second trend in mission and missiology, dealing with the community in relation to the world, is the movement in concentric circles out of a ghetto situation and into outreach to cross-cultural settings.

In some Communist countries, witnessing for Christ could have the consequence of *martyria*. Many people have suffered for their faith. Their stories

<sup>17</sup> András Csepregi, "Jézus Krisztus Keresztje: Befogadás? Miroslav Volf Ölelés És Kirekesztés Című Munkájának Ismertetése," (n.d.), <http://boecs.hu/beke/Volf.htm> (accessed August 29, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> This incident occurred at the local committee meeting for the IAMS 2008 World Assembly, January 28, 2007.

have to be recorded and have to be told, and we have to listen to them. Missions has never been a success story, it has always been linked with suffering of some sort. Did you ever notice how much Paul had to deal with difficult situations, with adversaries of whatever kind? In prayer letters, missionaries tend to emphasize the success stories that help in the fund raising. But read between the lines—did you ever take a course on martyrs in missions?

Mihai Malancea tells us that in some Central Asian republics, such as Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, it is forbidden for people to register in national evangelical churches. In Uzbekistan, Christians meeting in cell groups find themselves continuously under threat. "One of the pastors in a local church was brought before the court four times in recent months because people were coming to worship in his home. Police outside his home questioned those who came and threatened them. At the same time, the pastor was trying repeatedly to register the church but was rejected each time."<sup>19</sup>

In the Communist era, people were under serious pressure to keep religion and faith within the private sphere. Churches were not allowed to be "relevant," to speak to the context.<sup>20</sup> Their message was made to appear outdated, "for decrepit old women wrapped in scarves."<sup>21</sup> So Christians could not live for the present; the relation between church and world was thus limited or was annulled. The ghetto mentality brought about a sort of Canaan language, especially within the free churches.

This dichotomy has been reinforced by nineteenth-century Pietism, with its narrow view of spirituality as a personal, existential, and emotional relationship with God, which had had a strong influence in Eastern Europe.<sup>22</sup> The result was that the majority of Christians still live in a strong dichotomy,

<sup>19</sup> Mihai Malancea, "Discerning God's Presence and Activity in Central Asia," in *Mission in the Former Soviet Union*, ed. Walter Sawatsky, Peter Penner, and International Baptist Theological Seminary (Schwarzenfeld, Germany: Neufeld Verlag, 2005), 137.

<sup>20</sup> Miklós Tomka, "The Changing Social Role of Religion in East and Central Europe: Religion's Revival and Its Contradictions," *Social Compass* 42, no. 1 (1995): 23.

<sup>21</sup> See also David Machajdik and Juraj Kusnierik, *Central European Christians in Postmodern Times: A Sen Study Paper Describing How Christians in Post-Communist Central Europe Deal with the Rapidly Transforming Culture*, Sen Research Paper, ed. Judi Oglesby (Bratislava: SEN, 1999), 18–19.

<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note that originally Pietism was actively involved in satisfying social needs and tackling social problems; we need only think of the many orphanages, schools, and other welfare institutions they established. Individualism and subjectivism has, of course, always been characteristic of Pietism.



like two worlds.<sup>23</sup> I touched upon that in talking about social reconciliation. In connection to Slovakia, Kusnierik remarks that even today there are hardly any articles on critical social issues such as nationalism, privatization, unemployment, or economic, social, and political questions.<sup>24</sup>

Within the last two decades, the churches of post-Communist Europe have widened the scope of missions in a variety of ways, although for most of them mission starts within the church. In many of the so-called "historical churches" of post-Communist Europe there is a certain gap between nominal, passive, and active church membership. Szűcs, of the Károli Reformed University, reminds us that so-called "cultural Protestantism" is widespread among many intellectuals who identify themselves with the Reformed tradition, even though they cannot commit themselves to the Reformed faith in a doctrinal sense.<sup>25</sup> The 2000 census in Hungary brought to light that 16 percent of the population—1.6 million people—consider themselves to belong to the Reformed Church, although only 12 or 13 percent regularly attend church. For other "historical churches," the percentages are similar. The phenomenon that Grace Davie, a British sociologist of religion, referred to as "believing without belonging" is thus also widespread in Hungary.<sup>26</sup> Szűcs draws the conclusion that "the first circle of its mission is among these nominal Christians who have only weak ties with the church."<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Juraj Kusnierik and Milan Eieel, *Shadows of the Past: The Impact of Communism on the Way People Think in Post-Communist Society*, Sen Research Paper, ed. Marsh Moyle (Bratislava: SEN, 1997), 23.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ferenc Szűcs, "National Church? The Reformed Churches in an Ethnic Community in the Carpathian Basin," in *Contextuality in Reformed Europe: The Mission of the Church in the Transformation of European Culture*, Currents of Encounter vol. 23, ed. Christine Liennemann-Perrin, H. M. Vroom, and Michael Weinrich (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004), 150, quoting László Tökéczki, "Keresztyén Hit És Kultúr Protestantizmus," *Théma* II, no. 2–3 (2000): 82–85.

<sup>26</sup> Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging*, Making Contemporary Britain series (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994). See also Miklós Tomka and Paul M. Zulehner, *Religion in Den Reformländer Ost (Mittel) Europas*, Gott Nach Dem Kommunismus (Ostfildern: Swabenverlag, 1999); Paul Michael Zulehner, *Religion Und Kirchen in Ost (Mittel) Europa: Ungarn, Litauen, Slowenien*, Gott Nach Dem Kommunismus (Ostfildern: Swabenverlag, 1999); András Máté-Tóth, et al., *Nicht Wie Milch Und Honig: Unterwegs Zu Einer Pastoraltheologie Ost (Mittel) Europas*, Gott Nach Dem Kommunismus (Ostfildern: Swabenverlag, 2000); Miklós Tomka, et al., *Religion Im Gesellschaftlichen Kontext Ost (Mittel) Europas*, Gott Nach Dem Kommunismus (Ostfildern: Swabenverlag, 2000).

<sup>27</sup> Ferenc Szűcs, "National Church?" 152. As a result, the mission article in the constitution of the RCH lists under the so-called "congregational mission" activities that tend to be incorporated in the regular church activities, such as preaching, youth work, visitation of members, diaconal work, evangelization, administration of the sacraments, and a variety of programs designed to facilitate Christian growth and maturity.

By way of illustration, allow me to briefly introduce Serena Edit Vass to you, a former student of Dr. Darrell Guder of the Princeton Theological Seminary, where he is dean of Academic Affairs and Henry Winters Luce Professor of Missional and Ecumenical The-



The next circle of mission activities in the RCH are the so-called "social missions" (*társadalmi missziók*), such as mission in jails and penal institutions; among the homeless, the blind, and alcoholics; in crisis-phone counseling centers; airport mission; military chaplaincy; mission in hospitals; and drug rehabilitation.<sup>28</sup> In the category of "social missions" we also find cross-cultural mission efforts, such as outreach to the Roma and among migrant people. There are probably more than 100,000 baptized Reformed Roma, but most congregations would be "unable and unwilling" to accept them into their church community.<sup>29</sup>

In 1998, a proposal was presented to the synod of the RCH to establish a department for cross-cultural missions, including world missions, but due to internal tensions and struggles of another sort, the proposal was taken off the agenda. World missions is still what we would call in Hungarian a "stepchild"

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ology. Vass lives in Soponya, a village of 2,400 inhabitants, fifty miles outside Budapest. I had not seen her for five years. She tells her story: "During my studies, I learned a lot from the missiology lectures. I am thankful for the theoretical foundations which I gained. Five years ago I was called to pastor three small rural villages, which used to be strongly Communist. There were four of us in one of the churches, six in the other and very few in the third too. We started with a prayer meeting, and I took up home visitation. For seven years, the church was without a minister. Now, five years later, there are over sixty people. Many of them have grown from being completely unchurched into faithful coworkers. Every week, there are at least eight different meetings, for children, youth, catechism, 30-plus and 60-plus groups, etc. Through the children, the mothers come to the church, and because of their changed lives, their husbands come to faith as well. We really have seen great miracles, for example, in a family in which there was domestic violence, the mother was getting increasingly into debt and in desperation wanted to take her own life. Through pastoral care, the children came to the children's club. Then first the mother came to the church and later the father. Now they are leading the 30-plus group. The family is again living in harmony. It is a matter of much prayer and pastoral care. The key is that whole families come to faith and that it is then evident that they are living as true Christian families. Credibility in their way of life—that is what counts. Paradoxically, what strikes me is that those who have attended the church for many years are now opposed to seeing the former atheists coming to faith and joining the church." It is difficult for them to overcome the past.

<sup>28</sup> László Medgyessy, "Mission or Proselytism? Temptations, Tensions and Missiological Perspectives in Eastern European Christianity: A Case Study of Hungary," in Lienne-mann-Perrin et al., *Contextuality in Reformed Europe*, 109–115. Many tend to refer to these activities with the term of Johann Wichern of nineteenth-century Germany as Home missions (*innere Mission*), differentiating missions in a geographical way in activities within the Christian world, in Europe, over and against foreign missions, in "pagan" countries, in the non-Christian world. It is obvious that this terminology does not really take into consideration the fact that Europe is no longer only Christian and that the majority of Christian churches are now found in an area that at the start of the twentieth century was referred to as the non-Christian world.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

(*mostobagyerek*), although at a local level a number of congregations have sent missionaries abroad and provide significant support for them.<sup>30</sup>

Scott Klingsmith conducted groundbreaking research into indigenous Central and Eastern European missionary sending efforts that began in 2000. Klingsmith's studies, focusing on some case studies in Poland, Romania, and Hungary, provide us with fascinating insights into the factors related to the rise of missionary sending movements in those areas of Europe.<sup>31</sup>

One of the very interesting case studies Klingsmith relates is from the western part of Romania called Transylvania, bordering Hungary, where a large Hungarian minority lives and where many ethnic Hungarian Reformed churches exist. This case deals with an ethnic Romanian—not someone belonging to the Romanian Orthodox Church, which is also strong in that area, but to a small evangelical church.

In 1988 [when Romania was still under communism], Marcel Hoban, then 18 years old, was a member of a youth group in Timisoara, Romania, which met regularly for prayer and Bible study. One guest speaker encouraged those attending to pray for countries with very few Christians and for Christians facing persecution. He also shared that Albania recently had declared itself the first officially atheistic country in the world. Hoban, together with his group, began to pray for a Bible translation and Christian response in Albania.

One day, while praying and studying the Bible, Hoban received a vision of mountains and darker-skinned people and heard an inner voice say, "There you will be a missionary." In April 1994, while visiting Albania, he came to a certain mountain. As he saw the needs of the surrounding villages, it suddenly became clear to him that this was the same mountain and these were the same people that he had seen in his vision. Agape, their [non-traditional pentecostal-charismatic] church in Timisoara, sent Marcel and his wife Felicia as missionaries to the village of Pinet. Six months after their church's funding ended, they responded to a previous invitation from Cornel Marincu, pastor of Aletheia, another church in Timisoara.

<sup>30</sup> Missionaries have been sent through such organizations as Wycliffe Bible translators, the German Liebenzeller Mission, Campus Crusade for Christ, Youth with a Mission, and Operation Mobilization. As far as I know other "historical churches" in the post-Communist world, the picture would not differ much. In 1999 an initiative was taken in that the Reformed and Lutheran churches in Hungary partnered with the RCA and the Church of South India in sending a missionary couple to South India. This promising and creative new partnership paradigm was, for unclear reasons, not continued. See also: Scott Klingsmith, "Hungarian Missionary Sending Efforts: A Case Study," *East-West Church & Ministry Report* 12, no. 3 (2004): 9–12.

<sup>31</sup> Scott Klingsmith, "Factors in the Rise of Missionary Sending Movements in East-Central Europe" (PhD diss., Trinity International University, 2002).

Despite being just one year old and with just some two dozen members, this church agreed to support the Hobans as its missionaries. In 2001, Aletheia sent another couple to serve in the village of Pinet in Albania. A church now of around 100 members, it wants to send missionaries to Serbia and also has someone preparing to go to the Muslim world.

Daniel Matei, a Pentecostal pastor, immigrated to the United States and then served as a missionary in China. Immediately after the 1989 Revolution he returned to Romania and shortly thereafter helped start a new style church. This charismatic church, Agape, unlike traditional Pentecostal churches in Romania, emphasized a more contemporary worship style, ministry training, and outreach. Matei had a heart for missions and it was part of his desire for Agape to become involved in missions. He encouraged his church to accept Hoban's vision and to support him. . . . When Hoban visited the church, it adopted his vision. . . . Church members . . . caught it for themselves and owned it."<sup>32</sup>

It is remarkable that in a poor country such as Romania the church is able to support the Hobans with \$250 a month. One respondent of Klingsmith's emphasizes: "Economics is not the biggest problem. People think first you have to have money. Not true. Money is only money. Most important is vision."<sup>33</sup> The Aletheia church was one of the first churches in Romania to send out missionaries without support from an outside organization. Although at some point that support was offered, the offer was declined. The leaders felt that "God had called them to do it, so they asked God to supply the needs."

The Hobans, living at the same level as the villagers, had to face hardships of various kinds in Albania. They hauled water by donkey and for three years did not have a car. They went as newlyweds to the village of Pinet to establish a Christian presence and were adopted and protected by the village. During the violence in 1997 many foreigners were evacuated, but the Hobans decided to stay. The villagers told them: "You'll be the last to die. First, we will die; then our children will die; only then would you die."<sup>34</sup>

In a sense, a Western mission organization had been a role model for the initiative of the Aletheia church, even though some Western missionaries had created problems in Romania with their attitude. But even that was taken as

<sup>32</sup> Scott Klingsmith, "Missionary Sending Movements in East-Central Europe: A Romanian-Albanian Case Study" *East-West Church & Ministry Report* 12, no. 4 (2004): 16, <http://www.eastwestreport.org/articles/ew12409.html> (accessed August 29, 2007). (Words in brackets are the author's.)

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

an example to learn from: "If this is what a missionary is, we can do a better job than they do. We have people who are more mature, better prepared, more experienced, and able to teach."<sup>35</sup>

The Polish Catholic Church has a long-standing missionary tradition, with more than 1,000 Polish Catholics serving overseas as missionaries. Some estimates are significantly higher. For the small Protestant minority (0.4 percent of a population of 38.5 million), "overseas" missions is a much newer idea. In 1992 the first Polish missionaries were sent on a short trip to Central Asia where they caught a vision for long-term ministry. The next year they returned, traveling six days by train, with almost no money and no idea what to expect.<sup>36</sup>

In 2000, twelve full-time Polish missionaries were serving in countries such as Tanzania, Mali, Lithuania, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Uzbekistan. One of Klingsmith's respondents, who had a clear vision and motivation, stated: "I think the Polish church could very easily be self-supported and could easily support 100 percent of missions efforts, but like many other sinners we feed ourselves first."<sup>37</sup>

One aspect of Klingsmith's research emphasizes the advantages Polish missionaries enjoyed while working in Central Asia, where many, especially the older ones, speak the Russian language, and where the living standard was not so different from what they were accustomed to and the cultural gap not as big as for Westerners. Another advantage is that the Poles do not need visas. An interesting observation is that "since Poles do not have money, they focus on relationships. People they serve likewise have little money and value relationships." Finally, Poles have had the experience of living under Soviet dominion and therefore go to Central Asia as fellow sufferers.

There is a puzzling question that I share with Klingsmith: why are the Protestant churches in Hungary not more active in sending missionaries outside their borders, to cultures different from their own? Klingsmith also wonders whether "sharing one's faith is part of the Hungarian historic church message and practice, at least as it would be defined by Evangelical groups."

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> In 1995 the Biblical Mission Association was established, with four branches, Mission to the East, Wycliffe Poland, Mission to Poles in the East and Ministry to Ukraine. According to Klingsmith, the funding of these initiatives presents a mixed picture. "Although most Poles are not in the habit of giving regularly or systematically they do exhibit great generosity when they see needs, responding spontaneously and practically." Probably about one third of the costs is covered locally, partly because of the declining Polish economy.

<sup>37</sup> Scott Klingsmith, "Missionary Sending Movements: A Polish Case Study," *East-West Church & Ministry Report* 13, no. 1 (2005): 12–15, <http://www.eastwestreport.org/articles/ew13106.html> (accessed August 29, 2007).



According to him, “emphasis is more on service and living out one’s faith in daily life rather than evangelism or public proclamation of the gospel.” He is not able to determine whether this “evangelistic reserve” is the effect of “theologically more liberal views present in the historic churches,” or of “having the movement led by a missiologist rather than a pastor or evangelist.” Honestly speaking, I do not think there is anything wrong with an emphasis on service and living one’s faith in daily life, and I do not think that is the antithesis of evangelism or the public proclamation of the gospel.

However, there is a danger in generalizing, and I do have the impression that the Protestant churches in Hungary find themselves in a new kind of ghetto. Under Communism, political factors curtailed the scope of witness of the churches, but even despite that it seems that much more happened, creatively, at unregistered youth camps, for example, than was officially allowed. In the past two decades, many pastors kept themselves busy, or were kept so, with building projects or renovating churches and the like, rather than with pastoring their churches and training them to grow into missional communities. Sometimes it seems it was in compensation for a state of spiritual poverty, not knowing how to build bridges for the gospel to the secularized Hungarians. However, we should not forget that a number of churches do show healthy signs of growth in both quality and quantity as they combine traditional and contemporary styles of worship, clear preaching, careful pastoring of the flock, and an open and welcoming community life.<sup>38</sup>

It seems that consumerism and strong preoccupations with their own denominations and with issues of national identity are strengthening an inward-looking rather than an outward-looking perspective. Furthermore, internal struggles and unresolved tensions of the past sap away much energy. Finally, I observe a strong tendency toward more businesslike concerns—toward a more centralized, managerial, money-driven perspective of being church and “handling” missions—rather than letting them flow out of grassroots, congregational initiatives and by a vision motivated by biblical and theological perspectives.<sup>39</sup> Thus it seems that in the Hungarian churches, as

<sup>38</sup> See also András Lovas, “Developing Missional Churches in the Reformed Church in Hungary: Mission Leadership in the City” (DMin thesis, Bakke Graduate University, 2006).

<sup>39</sup> This tendency is not restricted to Hungary. In an interview on February 28, 2007, in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* Bishop Hans-Christian Knuth from North Germany (Schleswig) reacts to the Reform discussions in the German Evangelical Church. He states: “The future initiatives have to come from below, and should not be ordered from above.” The proposals for Reform are too strongly determined by centralistic and economic perspectives and too little by firmness of faith (*Glaubensfestigkeit*). Knuth is convinced that each period in time contains certain threats to Christianity. In earlier periods, these were Marxism and Liberalism, and now it is a managerial approach. “At VW they will work



in many other European churches, secular values are permeating the church, robbing it of its mission zeal. Fortunately, it would be a grave mistake to generalize, even in the Hungarian context. I know of some local congregations fully supporting a missionary involved in crosscultural missions, although these developments in the denomination do affect work at the grassroots level in the congregations.

Klingsmith's research into the emerging missionary movement in Central Europe, dealing with some case studies in Romania, Poland, and Hungary, leaves one wondering why it is that the churches that are enjoying missionary "success," so to speak, in cross-cultural mission are "new" churches of a Pentecostal nature or minority churches, such as the Polish Baptists. Could it be that in those churches there is less of a drive for antimission than, for example, nationalism?

Why is it that Hungary seems, in a sense, to lag behind in the study of missiology, while at the same time in other theological curricula, missiology has been given more attention? Do theological reasons play a role? Are there more relativistic tendencies or internal tensions? Maybe a factor is the shift taking place in the denomination toward a more businesslike approach, causing some activities that do not bring enough value for their money to be questioned.

### III. CONVERTS OR PROSELYTES?<sup>40</sup>

The German missiologist Joachim Wietzke observed in 1994 that the proselytism debate was back on the ecumenical agenda for Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Recently John Witte stated that "a new war for souls has broken out in these regions—a fight to reclaim the traditional cultural and moral souls of these new societies and a fight to retain adherents and adherence to the indigenous faiths."<sup>41</sup> The large number of articles published

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effectively; therefore, clear criteria are needed. But that does not apply to the church. Growth and effectiveness are not issues which make a difference in the church." Knuth refers to the situation in the former GDR, where small churches often do very fruitful work. Today he is increasingly confronted with church models, which are characterized by a *kirchenfremdes* 'Konzemdenken,' a way of thinking of a large business concern, which is alien to the church. "That has nothing to do with the Gospel." See Hans-Christian Knuth, "Bischof Knuth Rügt Massiv Reformdebatte in Evangelischer Kirche," *EPD Pressedienst* (2007).

<sup>40</sup> Andrew F. Walls, "Converts or Proselytes?: The Crisis over Conversion in the Early Church," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 28 (2004): 2–6.

<sup>41</sup> John Witte, "Introduction: Pluralism, Proselytism, and Nationalism in Eastern Europe," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 36, no. 1–2 (1999): 3.

on this matter shows that proselytism is still an important issue on the missiological agenda of Central and Eastern Europe.

A few years ago, the head of the Roman Catholic Church in Russia, Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, raised the much-debated issue of proselytism in a report by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.<sup>42</sup> His observations are significant because they cut to the very core issue of religious freedom, an issue that relates to Protestants as much as to Catholics and Orthodox. Kondrusiewicz stated that there is an important difference in the way the Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches understand the concept of proselytizing. The Catholic Church does not automatically consider all native-born Russians to be Russian Orthodox: "You can hardly call an atheist who was baptized in the Orthodox Church but [who has] had no relations with any church during his life an Orthodox believer. If at some point in his life this person chooses to become a Catholic, it can't be called an act of proselytizing," Kondrusiewicz said.

Aleksandr Abramov, an official with the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church, disagrees with the Catholic point of view and says Russia was and is an Orthodox country and has its own traditions of Christianity: "We consider everyone who was baptized in an Orthodox way or has Orthodox roots to belong without any doubt to the Orthodox tradition. And we consider these people to be in our fold and we are against such a development when our [believers] are being taken away from us, very often by indecent means."<sup>43</sup>

Tamás Földesi brings the problem of proselytism back to a difference of opinion over the target group of missionary activity, saying the first target groups would be the atheists and agnostics, and the second would be adherents of non-Christian religions. According to Földesi, problems arise in relation to the third target group, whether "one should extend mission to adherents of other Christian churches."<sup>44</sup> The theoretical foundation for this latter mission is that "over and above being Christian churches, they believe that it is their own teachings that are most in accord with Christ's thought." In other words, "although all Christian churches are true simply by being Christian, one particular Christian church can be even truer."<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> On September 17, 2002.

<sup>43</sup> Elisabeth Kendal, "Defining Proselytism," *East-West Church & Ministry Report* 12, no. 1 (2004): 8, <http://www.eastwestreport.org/articles/ew12104.html> (accessed August 29, 2007).

<sup>44</sup> Tamas Földesi, "Mission and Proselytizing: The Hungarian Case," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 36, no. 1/2 (1999): 135.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 135–36.

Földesi continues by stating that an even more sensitive issue is whether mission should target "the very members of any particular church," in other words, one of the main target groups of mission must be "those who belong only formally to their respective churches."<sup>46</sup> It is this proselytism *within* the Protestant churches that causes most confusion in our Hungarian context. I agree with Volf that differences in theology play a secondary role. "For the most part, the problem of proselytism is an issue of personal power, cultural taste, generational difference, and financial independence."<sup>47</sup> So on both sides you can find Christians of evangelical beliefs.

One of the roots of the problem is a failure to understand the role of religion in building a national identity. Paul Mojzes points out that it is important to understand that most of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe are still in the nation-building stage, focusing on national unification. Religion plays an important role in affirming this collective identity, often in the form of the dominant historic religion, which was marginalized for so long. Because the missionaries belong to heterodox (interdenominational) religious communities, either from abroad or from the country itself, they are considered to be "obstacles in the process toward maximal homogenization," and for that reason, their activities give rise to great resistance from both national political and traditional religious leaders.<sup>48</sup>

"The proselytizers and other proponents of genuine choice in religious convictions have been quickly lumped into a single, negatively perceived group that is being rejected as 'alien.' The proselytizers often have not fully comprehended why and how threatening they are because they tend to be focused on more universal values such as 'truth,' 'salvation,' 'supranational values' and multiculturalism, all of which are internationalist agenda, in contrast to the nationalist agenda of majority religions."<sup>49</sup> Mojzes concludes that few have discovered that a way out of this dichotomy is "that respect for every person's religious liberty will contribute to a more vital modern community."<sup>50</sup>

Another root of the problem of proselytism is the fact that the definition of non-Christians by evangelical groups includes most members of the established churches.<sup>51</sup> Often these evangelical missionaries conclude from

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>47</sup> Miroslav Volf, "Fishing in the Neighbor's Pond: Mission and Proselytism in Eastern Europe," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 20 (1996): 27.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Mojzes, "Religious Topography of Eastern Europe," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 36 no. 1/2 (1999): 35.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> See Volf, "Fishing in the Neighbor's Pond," 26.

the negative reactions of the Protestant historic churches that they are "liberal," which strengthens them in their conviction that they need to be evangelized.<sup>52</sup> Volf states that what is considered to be legitimate mission by what he calls the evangelical Protestants (in my definition, the free churches) is considered to be "illegitimate and culturally damaging proselytism" by the Catholics and Orthodox, which he defines as the "established churches."<sup>53</sup>

So the perspective of what it means to be a Christian differs significantly. Established churches are more like "mothers who embrace all children born to them—that is, all those who were baptized," whereas the evangelical groups "are like stern fathers, and accept only those who behave—who actively believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord and act in accordance to their belief—therefore all those who do not behave—believe and act—are legitimate objects of evangelization."<sup>54</sup>

The problem of proselytism is aggravated by the strong focus of the evangelical missionaries planting new churches even in countries where the established Protestant churches are relatively strong. (Hungary has more than 1,500 Protestant churches all over the country.) Many argue that the incentive for making a priority of planting new churches in these countries is given with the statistical fact that hardly any "viable" churches are available, which can reproduce them. So instead of working on the revitalization of the existing churches, they chose to give priority to starting new ones.

Some reports of short-term missionaries returning from Russia and even some sociological reports give us the impression that evangelism in the 1990s has been highly successful. One states that "In a remarkable brief period of time, Russia has become one of the most God-believing countries in Europe."<sup>55</sup>

On the basis of his own quantitative and qualitative survey research, Perry L. Glanzer suggests the hypothesis that "Western missionaries have probably produced a significant number of individual converts, but the problem is that these individuals do not have a church home."<sup>56</sup> He observes that they are dissatisfied with Russian Orthodoxy because it fails to teach the Bible or Christianity in an understandable manner. On the other hand, while many

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Perry L. Glanzer, "Taking the Measure of 1990s Evangelism: Where Are Russian Converts Now?" *East-West Church & Ministry Report* 9, no. 3 (2001): 1–3, <http://www.eastwestreport.org/articles/ew09301.htm> (accessed August 29, 2007).

<sup>56</sup> See Glanzer, "Taking the Measure." See also David C. Lewis, "A Sobering Critique of Russian Protestant Church Growth," *East-West Church & Ministry Report* 9, no. 3 (2001): 5, <http://www.eastwestreport.org/articles/ew09303.htm> (accessed August 29, 2007).



found that a Protestant church service focusing on the personal needs of the community was a "unique and touching experience," it failed to touch their Russian soul. "They felt caught between Orthodoxy and Protestantism." They found the Bible teaching they wanted in the Protestant church, but for the rituals invoking reverence and awe, they went to the Orthodox Church.

Glanzer concludes: "Sadly, if these converts are any indication, the successful evangelical work of Western missionaries has produced a population of Russian Christians without church homes." When this thesis is true, that would imply that "evangelicals may need to reevaluate their recent mission work in Russia." The churches they planted obviously did not appeal to Russian sensibilities and will continue to be considered irrelevant to their own spiritual well-being and to that of the society. According to Glanzer, these results provide evidence of the concern expressed by Walter Sawatsky in 1992 that initial approaches to the former Soviet Union "failed to consider critical ecclesiastical issues."<sup>57</sup>

### CONCLUSIONS

In concluding my lecture, I would like to comment on the oldest bridge of Budapest, the Chain Bridge, named after Count István Széchenyi. There are three elements of this image that I would like to emphasize.

The first element has to do with the company that built the bridge. Széchenyi was an ardent Anglophile and introduced several modern British inventions to Hungary. The bridge was completed with Scottish help in 1849, thus helping the flow of traffic between Buda and Pest. The bridge was a good example of nationals and foreigners working together to improve life of the city and to make mutual engagement easier.

The cooperation between nationals and foreigners in missions in Central and Eastern Europe has taken a long learning curve, full of misunderstandings and tensions, while the parties involved have been learning to understand each other and seeking to bridge their differences, with the ultimate goal of easing the flow of the gospel out of the ghetto and into the world to improve the life of cities.

Another important element to emphasize is that a bridge makes it possible for traffic to flow in both directions. The mighty Danube is a formidable obstacle for the city of Budapest, but the many bridges allow the two parts of the city to engage with each other.

<sup>57</sup> Walter Sawatsky, "After the Glasnost Revolution: Soviet Evangelicals and Western Missions," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 16 (1992): 54-60.



In this lecture, I have dealt with trends and challenges of the community in its world. There seem to be unbridgeable gaps among the various ethnic groups in the post-Communist world, especially between the Roma and other social sectors, and church communities are deeply divided over ethnic and denominational issues. Reconciliation as a theological concept is accepted as it relates to the good news of the Kingdom that the gap between God and men has been bridged in Jesus Christ, but there is a long way to go to translate that into social reconciliation—practice often seems to lag behind belief.

Finally, it is important to point out that bridges link two different banks of a city. The Chain Bridge may have quickly improved the flow of traffic, but it has taken much longer for the mindsets in the two parts of the city to change. One travel guide points out that both parts of the city retain their own distinct identity. Buda, the guide states, is old, proud, quiet, and a bit dotty, like an old aunt you visit only on weekends. Pest, on the other hand, is beautiful, confusing, often loud and incomprehensible, and quite likely to keep you awake far into the night. Yet both cities work together and provide the necessary components that make this vibrant city what it is—perhaps a model for the mission of the church in Central and Eastern Europe! Uniformity is not a precondition for unity, and bridge building does not mean that an individual's identity is dissolved.

# The Recovery and the Promise of Friendship

by DAVID J. WOOD

*David J. Wood serves on the staff of the Fund for Theological Education as the Coordinator of the Lily Endowment's Transition-into-Ministry Programs. He delivered these two lectures as part of the Princeton Forum on Youth Ministry in Nashville, Tennessee, on January 10 and 11, 2007. Wood is writing a book on the critical connection between the practice of friendship and the well-lived pastoral life, in which a version of these lectures will appear. The book will be published by Brazos Press.*

## TOWARD THE RECOVERY OF FRIENDSHIP AS A FORM OF CHRISTIAN LOVE

Let me begin with a word of genuine appreciation for your ministries with youth. I do not say this with any condescension the way the typical person responds on an airplane when they learn I am a pastor: "I really respect that." Which always communicates the unspoken "I didn't know any thinking person really did that for a living."

Rather, my words of appreciation are spoken as someone who knows both youth and ministry—as a pastor of many youth over the years and now as a father of two seventeen-year-old sons and a twenty-year-old daughter. I have never been more aware of the critical importance of those who count it their ministry to know, engage, love, mentor, and befriend youth. Given the cultural conditions we are in, your work, your skills, your calling have never been more crucial and more challenging.

In his book *Liquid Modernity*, Zygmunt Bauman argues that we are no longer living in a time of solids but of flows and liquids.<sup>1</sup> The glaciers of tradition—which take millennia to form—are melting before our eyes: 90 percent of the 3,900 square miles of ice shelves that existed in 1906 (and at least three thousand years before that) where the Arctic explorer Robert Peary first surveyed the region, are now gone. By the year 2040, the region will be mostly water.<sup>2</sup> This is sign and a symbol of the times in which we live. It's not just a sea change, the sea itself is changing. Polar bears are not the only ones who should be nervous.

David Lyon, in his book *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times*, identifies two principal conditions that are altering the cultural seas of

<sup>1</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Revkin, "After 3,000 Years, Arctic Ice Shelf Broke off Canadian Island, Scientists Find," *New York Times*, December 12, 2006.

everyday life: the development and diffusion of communication and information technology, and the growth of consumerism.<sup>3</sup>

He elaborates, "These in turn both depend upon and stimulate global flows of communication, cultural codes, wealth and power." My way of putting it is that we are living in an age of conspicuous consumption, anonymous information, and promiscuous communication. The central thesis of Lyon's book is:

The postmodern places question marks over older, modern assumptions about authority, and it foregrounds questions of identity. It does so because at a profound social level, time and space, the very matrix of human social life, are undergoing radical restructuring."<sup>4</sup>

Now, back to my parenting and your ministries. Any parent in this day and age can tell you the truth of Lyon's claims. Monitoring and mediating our children's use of technological devices constitutes a central moral task of parenting. It is the nexus of negotiation in every household and goes far beyond how much time is spent in front of one screen or another. PSPs, Xboxes, Ipods, cell phones, TV, computers—except for the TV none of these screens were operational in my adolescence. Even the TV was a miniature version of today's multichannel options. Any parents paying attention are working hard to keep their children from being swept up and away in the flows of technology. One could say that parents are working overtime to keep their children and their households incarnational, that is, grounded in the world of time, space, and bodies. This helps to explain why parents are willing to expend so much extra effort to involve their children in sports, music, dance—anything that will result in a full-bodied engagement. Technology presents a hyperreality, a high-definition reality that, on the face of it, is far more captivating than setting the table and having a slow meal with relaxed and meaningful conversation followed by a little communal dishwashing.

The temptation to what Marshall McLuhan called "the discarnate life" is hard to resist.<sup>5</sup> Who doesn't want to move at the speed of light? It is in light of these conditions that the deep relevance of your work comes to the foreground. So much of your work involves building relationships that are

<sup>3</sup> David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000), 11.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> For an excellent discussion of this theme in Marshall McLuhan's thought, see Paul Levinson, *Digital McLuhan: A Guide to the Information Millennium* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 55–64.

face to face, centered in time and space, in a community characterized by friendship. At the heart of your work is friendship and at the heart of friendship is the love that makes the time and space of our lives sacred and holy.

Jesus inducted his disciples in this kind of work long ago.

This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father (John 15:12-15).

These words are a pinnacle moment in John. They are spoken in the final hours of conversation between Jesus and the disciples, when he is seeking to prepare them for the days to come. The love he calls them to and into is the greatest love—the love of friendship. The entire Gospel of John unfolds this love. It is the gospel of the beloved disciple. It is the gospel of the good shepherd “who lays down his life for his sheep.” It is the gospel of footwashing—the act that transforms both servanthood and friendship.

The culminating episode in the public ministry of Jesus—the seventh and final miraculous sign revealing Jesus as Messiah—is the raising of Lazarus. This episode brings to the foreground his friendship with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Jesus receives word, “Lord, he whom you love is ill” (11:3). The narrator goes on to tell us that, “Though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed . . .” (11:5).

Jesus then reports to his disciples, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep” (11:11). It is interesting to note that this is the only place in the New Testament where Jesus refers to another individual (beyond the twelve) as “friend.” As Jesus approaches the tomb of his friend, in the company of the mourners, he weeps (11:35). This prompts those observing the scene to remark, “See how he loved him” (11:36).

He weeps with and for his friends. It is his friend Martha who professes for the first time in the Gospel of John the true identity of Jesus: “Yes Lord, I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God” (11:27). In John, the authorities pronounce the death sentence on Jesus not because of the disruption he brings to the commerce of the temple (as in the Synoptics). It is his raising of Lazarus from the dead that seals his fate (11:53).

On his way to Jerusalem for what would be the final week of his life, Jesus stops for a celebration dinner in the home of his friends—Mary, Martha, and

Lazarus. While there, Mary anoints Jesus with oil and wipes his feet with her hair. This is the first of two footwashing occasions in John. The second is performed by Jesus himself upon his disciples. When the narrator brings us to the tomb where the body of Jesus has been laid, it is Mary who now weeps at the grave of a friend. The bond of friendship is deeply intertwined in these pivotal episodes in the life of Jesus.

The narrative of love in John culminates in friendship. Gail O'Day writes, "For the first readers of John's Gospel, the link with friendship motifs helped to lay the groundwork for what John was teaching about the significance of Jesus' death." Jesus is never named "friend" in John—rather he embodies it in word and deed, perfectly. He confers friendship on his followers for them to embody in word and deed with each other.<sup>6</sup>

In the Gospel of John, Jesus makes his followers friends so that they might be friends and befriend the world. This prominence of friendship is not limited to John. New Testament scholar Luke Timothy Johnson writes, "Although rarely discussed explicitly, friendship is actually a prominent theme in the canonical compositions. But to recognize its prominence, readers need to grasp the connections that ancient readers would automatically make when they heard certain words and phrases."<sup>7</sup>

This lack of explicit reference in the New Testament to friendship should not lead to the conclusion that the earliest Christians rejected friendship-love (*philos*) and embraced a higher, more perfect form of love (*agape*). Much of the language of *koinonia* in the New Testament is the language of friendship: brothers, being of one spirit, having the same mind, being in one accord, and having all things in common. It was Aristotle who first talked of friendship's ultimate expression as "laying down one's life for one's friend."<sup>8</sup>

In spite of the evidence for the priority of friendship as a form of Christian love, friendship has not flourished as a theme in the history of Christian thought and certainly not in the contemporary situation. *Philos* has been trumped by *agape*. The so-called hierarchy of love has been stitched into the Christian imagination. The order of the priority of loves, from high to low, is *agape*, *philos*, and *eros*. Theological ethicist Helen Oppenheimer observes:

There is a kind of Christian slide away from friendship which is supposed to be a progression in love, but which humanly speaking is apt to be a progression in shallowness or even self-deception: a slide to a

<sup>6</sup> Gail R. O'Day, "Jesus as Friend in the Gospel of John," *Interpretation* 58, no. 2 (April 2004): 144–57.

<sup>7</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, "Making Connections: The Material Expression of Friendship in the New Testament," *Interpretation* 58, no. 2 (April 2004): 158–71.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*



sort of 'fellowship' which is no more than camaraderie or civility; to the kind of 'love of neighbor' which has no enjoyment in it; to the assumption that a stranger is more valuable than an old acquaintance; and eventually to the tacit belief that the love of people who are relentlessly hostile is more 'Christian' and therefore more worthwhile than any of our other affections.<sup>9</sup>

So, why the neglect? Given the importance of friendship in the actual practice of ministry, and in youth ministry in particular, given its presence in scripture and in the life and teachings of Jesus, why has it lived such a shadowy existence in Christian thought and reflection? The reasons are legion and complex. Let me offer a few reflections on this neglect—especially in reference to our contemporary situation.

*The sexualization of intimacy.* Writing in 1960 on the importance of friendship and the need for its rehabilitation in thought and practice, C. S. Lewis writes, "It has actually become necessary in our time to rebut the theory that every firm and serious friendship is really homosexual . . . those who cannot conceive of friendship as a substantive love but only as a disguise or elaboration of eros betray the fact that they have never had a friend."<sup>10</sup> The church, of course, has held out from the beginning for the possibility of a love and intimacy between individuals that did not require sexual expression in order to be full and complete. Part of the problem here is that we live in a time when intimacy inevitably signals sexual intimacy. What we lack is an imagination for an intimacy that is friendship. All of us have read the assertions by scholars that relationships of friendship in Scripture are unstated instances of sexual intimacies: David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi, Jesus and Mary. Our imagination of what counts as genuine intimacy within and across genders is too narrow. If it is true that we live in a culture where all true intimacy is sexual, then it is not at all surprising that we live in a culture where both sex and friendship are in trouble.

*An overemphasis on marriage and family in the life of the church.* The identification of intimacy with sexual expression in the larger culture shows up in the life of the church in an identification of intimacy with marriage and family. Browse the shelves of Christian literature in any bookstore and look for the literature on love. The volumes related to marriage and family eclipse the literature related to friendship. You will be hard-pressed to find any volumes on friendship. The so-called "love chapter," I Corinthians 13, is an

<sup>9</sup> Helen Oppenheimer, *The Hope of Happiness: A Sketch for a Christian Humanism* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 133.

<sup>10</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1960), 91.

exhortation to love one another as members of the Body of Christ. And yet, where and when is this chapter most often read? In the context of the wedding service, as if it were, in essence, a celebration of conjugal love. Interestingly enough, the language of friendship rarely shows up in wedding services. With the lens of friendship, one can read that chapter and see it as an ode to friendship—the kind of friendship that is to characterize the community that is governed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

*We are well-schooled in the hazards of intimacy beyond marriage and family.* I am thinking here particularly of those who serve as pastors. Years ago, Martin Marty wrote a column in the *Christian Century* in which he puzzled over the recent spate of headlines about clergy misconduct and suggested that all the remedial programs and safeguards being promoted to combat such misconduct fail to address what may be the leading cause of such behavior: “the reality of a friendless clergy.”<sup>11</sup> Compare the amount of time spent schooling pastors on the hazards of intimacy to the amount of time spent on exhorting them to the practice of friendship. The importance of bonding has been displaced by the necessity of boundaries. We have developed a thoroughgoing hermeneutic of suspicion when it comes to intimacy. This is not an argument against a healthy understanding of the importance of boundaries in the negotiation of the complex relational landscape of ministry. Rather, it is a call for a corresponding emphasis on the importance of friendship to one’s capacity to negotiate intimacy. One of the most hotly debated topics among pastors and those who educate them is whether pastors can have friends in their congregations. I think this is a debate that Jesus would have found troubling.

*An assumption that love blinds.* When you or I need to get the truth about our lives, it is necessary for us to entrust ourselves to someone who is essentially a stranger to our lives. Subjectivity inevitably distorts. No matter how much our friends may think they see and speak the truth, they cannot—by virtue of their intimate knowledge of us, they are disqualified from doing so. When we face personal problems, the objective, unrelated other becomes the most important conversation partner. In the world of therapy, friends are peripherals. Consequently, friendship is assigned to the realm of leisure and recreation and not to the realm of ethics and moral discernment. Friends are good to have around but not typically good for us. This, of course, would have been utterly inconceivable to the ancients, who thought it impossible to be good without good friends.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Marty, “What Friends Are For,” *Christian Century* 109, no. 4 (1992): 987–88.

*An overidentification of the spiritual life with the solitary life.* The pull toward withdrawal has always been strong in Christian thought and practice. The ideal of the pure, unmediated, direct, one-on-one Divine/human relation is well founded in the Christian tradition. The ascetic ideal has had a strong hold on the Christian imagination from the earliest days. The Franciscans put it like this: "Wherever we are or wherever we walk, we have our all with us . . . the Lord alone, who created the soul is its friend and no one else."<sup>12</sup> *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis has had a major influence on the understanding and practice of Christian piety. As McGuire writes: "The message of this powerful spiritual tract is that friends cannot be counted on to do anything except to distract each other from finding the only true friend—Jesus Christ."<sup>13</sup> What we end up with is a spirituality that leaves little or no meaningful place for friendship in the practice of the spiritual life. But this cuts against the grain of the biblical story. Jesus spent an inordinate amount of time with others, especially his disciples. Furthermore, he called them to spend time with each other. Through the reading of the gospels, it becomes abundantly clear that their life together was to be the primary context for mediating the knowledge of his presence with them. It was their being with each other that was to be the occasion for learning to love. It was in their time together—washing one another's feet, at the table breaking bread, in community sharing in prayer—that they were to recognize, again and again, the presence of Jesus in their midst. One does not have to dig deep in the New Testament or in Christian practice to deduce that Christianity has a positive view of time with others. Time with others is where and when revelation takes place. "Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in your midst" (Matt. 18:20).

On the other hand, one has to search long and hard for admonitions from Jesus to his disciples that they spend quality and extensive time apart from one another and alone in order to survive or thrive. In his final words to the disciples, Jesus urges them to gather in one place and await the Spirit. Indeed, in reading the New Testament, there is almost nothing of significance that happens in one's communion with God that does not happen in and through community. The first and enduring story of Christianity is a story of community—of what happens in and through being with others. The principal acts and rituals that establish a Christian's identity are profoundly personal and always communal: Eucharist, baptism, hearing the gospel. Even the

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Brian Patrick McGuire, *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience*, 350–1250 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1988), 413.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

central prayer Jesus teaches his disciples to pray is framed as a communal act: "Our Father . . ." When Jesus appears to his disciples after his resurrection, it is always in community. When one is absent from community, such as Thomas, the experience is one of unbelief and doubt. It is important to note that this time with others is almost never identified as time with one's family—with spouses, siblings, parents, or children. Often, when family is named in relation to the Christian life, it is identified as an impediment. Jesus's family come to take him away from his community of disciples. When the excuse is given by a would-be disciple that he must spend time with his family, Jesus seems entirely unsympathetic: "Let the dead bury the dead!" (Matt. 8:22). Indeed, the call to discipleship is identified with a call to leave one's family. But it is never a call to be alone or to leave one's friends. This is not an argument against solitude or its importance to our spiritual formation. It is a claim that without friendship, solitude too easily devolves into isolation and reinforces alienation. Friendship prevents solitude from becoming isolation.

These are tendencies that contribute to a neglect of friendship. They are not practices of resistance to friendship, they are practices of neglect. The result is that a whole dimension of our relational lives is left unnamed, unclaimed by love.

Let me conclude with one more story of friendship from the Gospel of John. It comes from John 21:15–19. Jesus has caught up with his disciples, who have gone fishing in the wake of his resurrection. They are reunited on the seashore of Galilee, where their journey began years earlier. As they are eating together, Jesus turns to Peter and asks, "Simon, son of John, do you love (*agapao*) me more than these?" Peter replies, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love (*phileo*) you." A second time Jesus asks, "Simon son of John, do you love (*agapao*) me?" And a second time Peter replies, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love (*phileo*) you." Then, again, Jesus asks Peter to declare his love—but this time, Jesus does not use *agapao* for the word love, but *phileo*—the love of friendship: "Simon, son of John, do you *phileo* me?" Peter replies, "Lord, you know all things, you know that I *phileo* you!" A common reading of this text is that Peter is not quite ready to rise to the level of love Jesus desires from him—that is, to the highest form of love, *agape*. Instead he can only profess a secondary, lesser form of love, *philos*. But given the context of *philos* in John as I previously discussed, as the greatest love that can be shown, it is highly possible that Peter was once again declaring his love as friend and yearning for the same from Jesus. In the end, Jesus meets Peter at the high ground of friendship. Is there a greater gift to offer or to be received in this life than the love of friendship?



This is the heart of your work and of the work of all Christian community.

# THE PROMISE OF FRIENDSHIP AND THE PRACTICE OF MINISTRY

We live in a paradox. No culture has ever had such a sophisticated means of communication and yet, according to a recent study, social isolation seems to be on the upswing.<sup>14</sup> The study was implemented in 1985 and again, for the sake of comparison, in 2004. Here are some of the notable findings of the developments between 1985 and 2004:

- Those reporting four to five discussion partners went from 33 percent to 15 percent.
- The number of those who discuss important matters with a spouse increased from 30 percent to 38 percent.
- Particularly surprising was the drop in the percentage of people who talk to at least one person who is *not* kin, from 80 percent to 57 percent.
- The number of people who have someone to talk to about matters that are important to them has declined dramatically, and the percentage of the American population who feel isolated has increased, from 25 percent to 50 percent.
- The findings show that computer technology tends to foster a wider, less localized array of weak ties rather than the strong, interconnected confident ties measured in the survey.

Robert Putnam, in his landmark study *Bowling Alone*, concludes, "Across a wide range of activities, the last several decades have witnessed a striking diminution of regular contacts with our friends and neighbors. We spend less time in conversation over meals, we exchange visits less often . . . more time watching and less time doing."<sup>15</sup>

In the previous lecture, I focused attention on the impoverishment of friendship from within the history of Christian thought and practice. What these studies are revealing is that the impoverishment of friendship is no less in evidence in the culture at large. We live in a time that is ripe for a revival of friendship as a primary form of Christian love. In this lecture, I intend to sketch out a more robust understanding of friendship than is current in most of our communities—Christian or otherwise. I will then speak directly to the promise of friendship in relation to youth pastors and to youth ministry.

<sup>14</sup> Miller McPherson and Lynn Smith-Lovin, "Social Isolation in America: Changes in Core Discussion Networks over Two Decades," *American Sociological Review* 71 (June 2006): 353–75.

<sup>15</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 115.



Aristotle remains a generative starting point for a robust definition of friendship. He identifies friendship as “indispensable for life. No one would choose to live without friends, even if he had all other goods.”<sup>16</sup> According to Aristotle, there are three fundamental forms of friendship: friendships of use, friendships of pleasure, and friendships of character. Friendships of use and pleasure are most common and easiest to identify in our lives. These friendships are positive and laudable. In these friendships, however, we love another for reasons external to the friend. When the shared use or pleasure wanes, so does the friendship. What we lack is a view of friendship that corresponds to Aristotle’s third and highest form of friendship—friendship of character. In friendships of character we love the other because of who they are, in and of themselves. This is not a static or stoic form of love but is dynamic and creative of the very character in which is grounded. The essential marks of this form of friendship, as explained by Ralph Potter, are:

1. Voluntariness
2. Mutuality and reciprocity
3. Esteem and goodwill
4. Common activity
5. Sharing of inner life
6. Continuing commitment
7. Positive affection
8. Equality
9. Virtue<sup>17</sup>

Reflecting on Aristotle’s category of character friendship, Potter concludes,

My *thesis* is that such friendships are good for us individually and, at the same time, also benefit the entire community by functioning as *schools of virtue and love* from which we emerge better instructed concerning what it takes to co-exist with others. New sensitivities to others are formed. A better sense of our possibilities and limits is attained. Our sense of self is stabilized and enhanced. We are, if all goes well, better persons and

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.1.

<sup>17</sup> Ralph Potter, “Friends and Other Relations,” unpublished lecture delivered at Occidental College (April 3, 1996). In this lecture, Potter summarized Francis Bacon’s view of the goods of friendship: “First, it allows us to discharge the emotional swellings of our hearts to thoughtful, well-disposed persons who take turns in speaking and listening. Second, the dialogue of friends helps to correct our perception and judgment. Friends serve as *mirrors* which enable us to gain a more accurate knowledge of ourselves and our actions. Finally, friends provide practical services in spots where we could not act on our own behalf.”

better citizens. Our capacity for social intercourse, in all settings, has been upgraded.<sup>18</sup>

John Cooper, in his essay "Aristotle on Friendship," summarizes two arguments in *Nicomachean Ethics* for why it is, in Aristotle's view, that friendship (particularly the friendship rooted in character) is so critical to one's thriving.

Aristotle argues, first, that to know the goodness of one's life, which he reasonably assumes to be a necessary condition of flourishing, one needs to have intimate friends whose lives are similarly good, since one is better able to reach a sound and secure estimate of the quality of life when it is not one's own. Second, he argues that the fundamental moral and intellectual activities that go to make up a flourishing life cannot be continuously engaged in with pleasure and interest, as they must be if the life is to be a flourishing one, unless they are engaged in as parts of shared activities rather than pursued merely in private; and given the nature of the activities that are in question, this sharing is possible only with intimate friends who are themselves morally good persons.<sup>19</sup>

The moral philosopher Alasdair McIntyre provides a modified version of Aristotle's typology of friendship that I think is helpful in identifying the diverse experiences of friendship that mark our journeys.<sup>20</sup> Like Aristotle, he proposes a threefold typology.

1. *Accidental Friendships*: In these friendships, we are bound to one another in mutual pleasure or utility. This connection does not rest upon who a person is as much as in experiences that are shared. Once those experiences diminish, the connection withers and the friendship is easily displaced. The fundamental condition of these friendships is one of "impermanence." Even so, these friendships can endure for some time and can even develop to a deeper stage.
2. *Timely Friendships*: these friendships originate at a point in our lives when we face a choice or a series of choices that will be determinative of what kind of person we are going to become and what kind of life we are going to lead. These friendships help us become better persons not simply by offering advice, but also by exemplifying a way of life and participating

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> John M. Cooper, "Aristotle on Friendship," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 330–31.

<sup>20</sup> Alasdair McIntyre, "What Both the Bad and the Good Bring to Friendships in Their Strange Variety," in *Amor Amicitiae: On the Love that Is Friendship*, eds. Thomas A. F. Kelly and Philipp W. Rosemann (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2004), 241–55 (esp. 251–55).

with us in shared activities. "A timely friend excites us by making us aware of the possibilities that we confront at just this moment in our lives."

3. *Enduring Friendships*: these friendships cut across time and reach to the depths of who we are. As McIntyre describes it, "the life of each friend becomes an integral and constitutive part of the life of the other . . . something that can only happen over a period of time and that, once it has happened, will only be terminated by death or by physical separation."

In summary, McIntyre relates and contrasts the three experiences of friendship in this way: "In accidental friendships in one way and in timely friendships in another the friend matters to one because of the impact that she or he has on one's life. In enduring friendships, which may well have begun as accidental or timely friendships, the friend has an impact on one because of the degree to which and the way in which the friend matters to one."<sup>21</sup>

Friendship is a profound form of love in our lives. As these reflections suggest, it does not come in one form. What I find helpful about these various descriptions is that it helps us to locate and appreciate the variety of ways friendship affects our lives. If everybody is a friend, then we will not recognize and treasure true friendship. If only the closest of confidants is a friend, then we will fail to appreciate the love we experience in countless ways in the course of our lives. Liz Carmichael, in her book on the history of friendship in Christian thought, put it this way: "Two things are disastrous: to have too high and narrow a doctrine of friendship, making it exclusive, or to forget friendship altogether in pursuit of universal neighbor-love."<sup>22</sup>

Too often, it has been assumed that the introduction of love as *agape* by the early church made the classical tradition of friendship obsolete. It is more accurate to say that the introduction of love as *agape* both connected with existing notions of friendship and significantly revised them. The paradigmatic shift in the understanding and practice of friendship from classical thought to Christian thought is this: from a perception of friendship as a relationship exclusive to the domain of virtuous men to the practice of friendship as a relationship characteristic of an ever-widening circle of men and women who are bound together by their common commitment to Christ. Augustine names this transformation of friendship when he writes, "Though they cling to each other, no friends are true friends unless you, my God, bind them fast to one another through that love which is sown in our

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>22</sup> Liz Carmichael, *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 198.

hearts by the Holy Ghost.”<sup>23</sup> In making the connection between the love of God and love of friendship, the Catholic theologian Jean Leclercq highlights the tradition that sees friendship as the love exemplified in the Garden of Eden and in the love we anticipate in the fullness of heaven. “It has proved possible to see friendship as a residue, a symbol, of that charity which existed before the first sin—a charity that was spontaneous. Now charity has been made difficult by antipathies and enmities. Particular friendship preserves something of that original charity.”<sup>24</sup>

For our purposes, I would like to focus on the relevance of friendship to the flourishing of our vocational lives as pastors and conclude with some final reflections on how the lens of friendship might shape our practice of ministry—particularly ministry with youth.

Those who are called forth in the life of the church for the purpose of special ministry share, in the particularity of that calling, a particular potential and need for the cultivation of friendship. With the vocational life of pastors in view along with the particular demands intrinsic to that life, let us review the goods of friendship and their importance to the characters of those in ministry—lay and ordained. How does our work in ministry illuminate the goods for friendship?

*In cultivating a knowledge of God.* Revelation and relationality are inextricably bound up with each other. As important as time alone with God is to our knowledge of God, the testimony of scripture and the church is that life together mediates a love and knowledge of God that we cannot attain in solitude. We need to recover, in our practice of the spiritual life, the importance of time with particular others—those with whom we share a mutual love and trust that is characteristic of friendship—in our understanding and experience of God.

*In cultivating a knowledge of self.* Acquiring and maintaining a truthful perception of oneself is essential to the practice of ministry. Friendship is essential to the cultivation of self-knowledge. We need others if we are to know ourselves. In many ways, we come to know ourselves as we are known by others. Paul seems to indicate that heaven is the fulfillment of this kind of knowing: “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Cor. 13:12). As I noted in the previous lecture, we have come to believe in the strongest possible terms that self-knowledge is best mediated to

<sup>23</sup> Augustine *Confessions* 4.4.7.

<sup>24</sup> Jean Leclercq, “Friendship and Friends in the Monastic Life,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly Review* 24, no. 4 (1989): 297.



us by perfect strangers (such as therapists and counselors) who refuse to be our friends.<sup>25</sup> Truth and love are closely bound in the Christian imagination. Knowledge of self is an achievement and not a given—or more accurately, it is a gift. More often than not, it is a truthful knowledge of oneself that discloses to us the gift that is friendship.

*In cultivating a knowledge of intimacy.* Ministry necessarily involves one intimately with a variety of persons. The more attuned one is to appropriate intimacy—particularly in the context of relationships not defined by the boundaries of marriage or family—the greater one's capacity to recognize and avoid inappropriate intimacy. Developing a healthy sense of boundaries in the indeterminate zones of relationality that characterize all ministry depends upon the experience of vital bonding with others. Not having friendships of character will leave you vulnerable to using youth to meet your need for friendship.

*In cultivating a capacity to deal with conflict.* If we are to be capable of not taking everything personally, there must be someone with whom we can share our lives personally, without fear. We must have relationships that will help us to work through conflicts—conflicts that arise in the course of friendship as well as those that arise in the course of ministry. At the heart of friendship is the freedom and trust to speak and to hear the truth.

*In cultivating the capacity to model friendship.* If friendship is to be recovered as a practice central to the character of Christian community it will be due in no small part to the capacity of leaders to bear witness to the practice of friendship in their own lives.

Building upon these reflections on the deep relevance of friendship to the life of the youth minister, I would like to end by making the direct connection between the practice of friendship and the practice of youth ministry.

1. *Youth ministry is face-based community.* At the center of all you do is the practice of face-to-face community—calling young people to be together in love. A worthy aim for every youth ministry is the flourishing of friendship. Teaching about friendship as a form of Christian love will help to create a broader vision and practice of love and intimacy than will ever be discovered in the culture at large and in youth culture in particular.
2. *Friendship is not a program, it is a practice.* It is not a technical quick fix that will jump-start your youth program. There is a tendency in evangelical

<sup>25</sup> My point here is not to diminish the importance of therapists and other professional counselors. I am, however, suggesting that there is a connection between the impoverishment of friendship and our assumption that such professionals are the first and necessary recourse in our lives when we face difficulties.



Christianity to presume intimacy too quickly and thus to render the category of friendship, where such intimacy is developed over time, irrelevant. I can recount numerous occasions when I have been called upon as part of an audience at a conference of one sort or another to turn to my neighbor and share the deepest struggle with temptation I am facing in my life. Being in Christian community does not in and of itself create the conditions for intimacy. Friendship is slow and lingering. Friendship is a gift, whether given or received. The most you can do, and this is a lot, is to create the conditions where love of friendship flourishes.

3. *Do not condemn cliques.* Or at least, do not fail to appreciate the need of youth to connect meaningfully and in particular ways with certain others. On one level, the cliques can be viewed as arrested forms of friendship. It is not out of the question that cliques may contain the seeds of friendship. Use cliques—these natural, spontaneous, often highly immature forms of bonding—as a stage for learning. Cliques will inevitably fill the void of friendship in a youth group.
4. *Friendship is not the exclusive work of youth ministry.* Friendship is the work of the church. Youth in their passion for friendship can become the flashpoint for the practice of friendship in congregational life.<sup>26</sup> However, for the youth to grasp the power and promise of friendship, friendship must be no less in evidence in the life of the church. Friendship is not a youth thing. It is a central practice of the Christian life.
5. *Technology is not the enemy, neither is it a friend.* For all the power technological devices exercise in everyday life, they remain devices. However, the less relationally rich our lives are, the more vulnerable we become to employing these devices in ways that increase and deepen our isolation. Placing ourselves hours on end before a machine that emits light and

<sup>26</sup> Chris Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton call for a view of youth that does not segregate them or their issues from the larger life of congregations. "One of the biggest obstacles to our understanding teenagers' lives is the common apparent inability to see their lives within the larger, very powerful social and cultural context that forms it. . . . Adults typically frame adolescence in ways defining teenage life per se as *itself* a social problem and adolescents as alien creatures, strange and menacing beings, perhaps even monsters driven by raging hormones, visiting us from another planet. Teenagers—our own children—this theme suggests, are more dissimilar to us than they are like us, separated from the adult world by light years of distance and difference." To the contrary, Smith and Denton explain, "Most problems and issues that adults typically consider teenage problems are in fact inextricably linked to adult-world problems. Furthermore, most teens appreciate the relational ties they have to the adult world, and most of those who lack such ties wish they had more and stronger ties. . . . Adults need alternative mental and discursive models that emphasize grown-ups' similarities to, ties to, and common futures with youth." *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 264.

enables us to travel anywhere at any time and to communicate with anyone about anything is a “thing” loaded with idolatrous potential. Lives centered by the practice of friendship have the power to marginalize technology and limit its use in our lives. The reality of friendship can counter the hyperreality of cyberspace. Do your youth have a vision of friendship that is not centered by technology?

6. *You are not Super-Friend*. Cultivating the conditions for the practice of friendship in your ministry with youth is not in any way to be equated with your becoming everyone’s best friend. Furthermore, as I noted earlier, the more rich your life is in terms of friendship, the less vulnerable you will be to using youth ministry to compensate for your own relational needs. Having said that, forming friendship ties with youth in a way that leaves space and creates the capacity for them to form friendships with their peers is critical to your ministries.

In the movie *Shall We Dance*, Susan Sarandon plays a wife who has reason to believe that her husband is having an affair. She hires a private investigator to tail him. He does and comes up with information that, in his mind, strongly suggests her suspicions are valid. When he reveals this information to her, it leads to a conversation between them about why people get married in the first place. The private investigator gives the predictable answer of romance and companionship which, in his mind, explains why so many marriages end. The wife disagrees and proposes her own insight: “We get married because we all need a witness to our lives.” It is true isn’t it? We all need a witness to our lives. Without such a witness, we live in a crushing anonymity—even though we move day in and day out among countless others. Without the witness of friends, we walk alone in the uncertainty that someone cares enough to see us truly, to know us for who we are, to love us in the particularity of our lives. At the heart of the Christian gospel is the conviction that God in Christ is *the* witness to our lives. What is Christian community if it is not the place where we come to know we are not alone through the love of Christ in the gift of friendship? One day we will know and be fully known. Until then, we have friends.

# Why Did Jesus Have to Die?: An Attempt to Cross the Barrier of Age

by STANLEY HAUERWAS

*Dr. Stanley Hauerwas delivered this lecture in Princeton on May 3, 2007, at the Princeton Forum on Youth Ministry. Dr. Hauerwas, the Gilbert T. Rowe Professor of Theological Ethics at Duke Divinity School, is the author of Matthew: Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (2006) and The State of the University: Academic Knowledges and the Knowledge of God (2007). This lecture appeared in the Lent 2006 issue of The Cresset. It is printed here with permission of the publisher.*

## ON BEING YOUNG AND BEING CHRISTIAN

I lecture and write often, but I am not sure how to write to those our society identifies as the young or adolescents. I do not know who you are and I am a bit frightened by that unknown. The last band I knew was U2 and I only knew them because they were the last group introduced to me by my son before he “grew up.” I do not know what you read or the movies you see. So I do not know how to “connect” with you.

Moreover, I think it is disgusting for an older guy to try to show he can be “with it.” I do not want to be “with it.” I quit teaching freshmen when I taught at the University of Notre Dame. I did so because I simply found it demeaning to try to convince eighteen-year-olds that they ought to take God seriously. Eighteen-year-old people in our society simply lack the resources to take God seriously—by a resource I mean having noticed that before you know it, you are going to be dead.

Alasdair MacIntyre, a philosopher, has suggested that one of the worst things our society does to the young is to tell them they ought to be happy. MacIntyre thinks if you are happy, particularly when you are young, you are probably deeply self-deceived. Your appropriate stance is to be miserable. What a terrible time to be young. Shorn of any clear account for what it means to grow up, you are forced to make up your own lives. But you know that any life you make up is not a life you will want to live.

I do not necessarily want this lecture to make you miserable, but I hope that at least some of what I say may help illumine why you are miserable. Indeed I do not want this lecture to be “memorable” for you, particularly if “memorable” means you will think the Princeton Forum on Youth Ministry\*

\* In the published version of this lecture, the author spoke of the “Duke Youth Academy.” Obviously when he delivered this lecture at Princeton, he changed the location

was a “wonderful” experience. I went to church summer camp once when I was growing up in Texas. I remember the highlight of the camp was on the last night to watch the sun go down from a mountain—well, a hill (it was Texas)—while we sang “Kumbaya.” This was an attempt to give us a “mountain-top experience” that we could identify with being or becoming a Christian. About the last thing I would want is for you to have such an experience here. I do not want to make Christianity easy. I want to make it hard.

I assume most of you are here because you think you are Christians, but it is not at all clear to me that the Christianity that has made you Christians is Christianity. For example:

- How many of you worship in a church with an American flag? I am sorry to tell you your salvation is in doubt.
- How many worship in a church in which the Fourth of July is celebrated? I am sorry to tell you your salvation is in doubt.
- How many of you worship in a church that recognizes Thanksgiving? I am sorry to tell you your salvation is in doubt.
- How many of you worship in a church that celebrates January 1 as the “New Year”? I am sorry to tell you that your salvation is in doubt.
- How many of you worship in a church that recognizes “Mother’s Day”? I am sorry to tell you your salvation is in doubt.

I am not making these claims because I want to shock you. I do not want you to leave the Forum on Youth Ministry thinking that you have heard some really strange ideas here that have made you think. It is appropriate that you might believe you are here to make you think because you have been told that is what universities are supposed to do, that is, to make you think. That is, universities are places where you are educated to make up your own mind. That is not what I am trying to do. Indeed I do not think most of you have minds worth making up. You need to be trained before you can begin thinking. So I have not made the claims above to shock you, but rather to put you in a position to discover how odd being a Christian makes you.

One of the great difficulties with being a Christian in a country like America—allegedly a Christian country—is that our familiarity with “Christianity” has made it difficult for us to read or hear Scripture. For example, consider how “Mother’s Day” makes it hard to comprehend the plain sense of some of the stories of Jesus. In Mark 3:31–35, we find Jesus surrounded by a crowd. His mother and brothers were having trouble getting through the



crowd to be with Jesus. Somebody in the crowd tells him that his mom cannot get through the mass of people to be near him, which elicits from Jesus the rhetorical question, "Who are my mother and brothers?" This he answered noting, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." Even more forcefully Jesus says in Luke 14:26: "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple." When you celebrate "Mother's Day," the only thing to do with texts like these is "explain them," which usually means Jesus could not have meant what he plainly says.

Of course the presumption that Christianity is a family-friendly faith is a small change perversion of the gospel when compared to the use of faith in God to underwrite American pretensions that we are a Christian nation possessing righteousness other nations lack. Consider, for example, this report from *The Washington Times*.

President Bush joined more than 100 parishioners at a seaside church yesterday in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance during services, a defiant dig at a recent San Francisco ruling on the pledges's "under God" phrase. In the middle of the morning service at St. Ann's Episcopal Church, Chaplain M. L. Agnew Jr. departed from the regular program and asked the congregation to stand and say the pledge to the U.S. flag. The pledge has become a constant fixture of Mr. Bush's public appearances since a panel of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the phrase "under God" made public-school recitation of the Pledge unconstitutional. He (President Bush) led children in the Pledge during a Fourth of July stop in which the reciters all but shouted out "under God." Mr. Bush, who often talks of his faith in God and the role it plays in his stewardship of the country, has called the court's decision "ridiculous" and "out of step with the traditions and history of America." The Pledge of Allegiance is not a part of any Episcopal liturgy, nor is its recitation a common custom, a church theologian (Rev. Kendall Harmon) told *The Washington Times*.<sup>1</sup>

When you have the President of the United States claiming that the "God" of the Pledge of Allegiance is the God Christians worship, you know you have a problem. The Christian God is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is not some further specification of the generalized god affirmed in the pledge, but the Trinity is the only God worthy of worship. The Christian

<sup>1</sup> *Washington Times*, July 8, 2002.



pledge is not the Pledge of Allegiance, but rather is called the Apostles Creed. That a church service, that a priest in that service, would include the Pledge of Allegiance is a sure sign that Christians no longer know how to recognize idolatry. The "Christianity" represented by St. Ann's Episcopal Church in Maine is not, in fact, Christian.

A harsh judgment to be sure, but one that needs to be made if we are to recover faithful Christian practice. I am not calling into question President Bush's sincerity. I am convinced he is a very serious Christian. The problem is not his sincerity. The problem is that the Christianity about which he is sincere is not shaped by the gospel. Unfortunately, he is not unique, but rather is but one instance of the general failure of the church in America to be the church. That the church has failed to be faithful is, of course, why I suggested that your salvation—as well as mine—is in doubt.

### WHY LOVE IS NOT THE ANSWER

One of the difficulties for anyone trying to figure out what it might mean to be a Christian in America is that our very familiarity with Christianity has made it difficult to hear what is read to us Sunday after Sunday from the Bible. For example, I suspect that many of you, when you are talking with friends about what life might be about, might say what makes you a Christian is a "personal relationship with Jesus." Such a relation, you might suggest, is about trying to be a loving person. You might even suggest that Christians are meant to love one another because our sins have been forgiven.

There is no question that love between the persons of the Trinity is at the very heart of the Christian faith, but I think nothing is more destructive to the Christian faith than the current identification of Christianity with love. If God wants us to be more loving, why do you need Jesus to tell us that? If Christianity is about the forgiveness of our sins, then why did Jesus have to die? If God is all about love, why go through the trouble of being this man, Jesus? Why did God not just tell us through an appropriate spokesman (it could have been Jesus) that God wants us to love one another? God, in such a faith, becomes that great OK who tells us we are OK and therefore, we are taught we should tell one another we are OK. But if Jesus is the proclamation of the great "OK," why would anyone have bothered putting him to death? There must have been some terrible failure in communication.

One of the problems with the identification of Christianity with love is how such a view turns out to be anti-Semitic and anti-Catholic. The Jews and Catholics become identified with the law or dogma in contrast to Protestant Christians, who are about love. Such a view assumes that any form of faith

that creates divisions must be retrograde because such a faith is not about being loving. Of course, when love becomes what Christianity is all about, we can make no sense of Jesus's death and resurrection.

For example, consider how the temptation narrative of Jesus in the fourth chapter of Luke must be read if Jesus is all about love. It is as if we think Jesus went out to find himself. Of course we are told that he "was driven out" to face the devil no less, but we know such language is "mythical." Such language was used to help us understand the spiritual struggle Jesus must have been going through, that is, he was confronting the existential nothingness of existence which was necessary for his ability to make an authentic choice about how he would live his life.

Returning from this desert, the disciples note he looks as if he has been through a very rough time. "Man, you look like you have been to hell and back," they might say. (No doubt they must have said something like this, for otherwise how do we explain the language of being tempted by the devil?) In response Jesus can be imagined to say, "You are right, I have had a rough forty days, but I have come to recognize what God wants from us. So I feel compelled to lay this big insight on you. I have come to realize that God, or whatever we call that we cannot explain, wants us to love one another. There, I have said it and I am glad I did."

Ask yourself, if that is what Jesus is all about—that is, getting us to love one another? Then why did everyone reject him? They did so, I think, because when Jesus was told by the devil that he would be given the power to turn stones to bread, he refused; when Jesus was offered authority over all the kingdoms of this world, he refused; when he was offered the possibility he would not die, he refused. Note that Jesus was offered the means to feed the hungry, the authority to end war between peoples, and even the defeat of death itself. But he refused these goods. He did so because Jesus knows God's kingdom cannot be forced into existence using the means of the devil.

But note that Jesus's refusal to play the devil's game does not mean that the kingdom he proclaims is not political. Jesus's work is political, but the kingdom politics he represents is one that comes through the transformation of the world's understanding of how to achieve good results. Jesus refuses to use the violence of the world to achieve "peace." But that does not mean he is any less political or that he is not about the securing of peace. It is, therefore, not accidental that after the temptation narrative, we see Jesus in a synagogue on the Sabbath reading from the scroll of Isaiah. The passage he reads says,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18-19).

After reading this Jesus sat down and said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

The offense is not that Jesus wanted his followers to be loving, but the offense is Jesus. Jesus is the politics of the new age, he is about the establishment of a kingdom, he is the one who has created a new time that gives us the time not only to care for the poor but to be poor. Jesus is the one who makes it possible to be nonviolent in a violent world. We should not be surprised that Jesus is the embodiment of such a politics. After all, Mary's song promised that the proud would have their imaginations "scattered," the powerful would be brought down from their thrones, the rich would be sent away empty, the lowly would be lifted up, and the hungry would be filled with good things. Is it any wonder that the world was not prepared to welcome this savior?

#### THE POLITICS OF JESUS

Jesus was put to death because he embodied a politics that threatened all worldly regimes based on the fear of death. It is quite instructive to read any of the crucifixion narratives from this point of view, but the account of Jesus's trial and crucifixion in the Gospel of John makes the political character of Jesus's work unavoidable. Consider, for example, how the arrest of Jesus makes clear the political character of Jesus's ministry. His arrest is often thought to represent the apolitical character of Jesus because he commands Peter to put away the sword Peter had used to cut off the ear of the priest's slave. To be sure Jesus rebukes Peter, but he does so because that is not the "cup" the father has given him. But the cup from which Jesus must drink is no less political for being nonviolent. Indeed Jesus's command to Peter is one of the clearest indications that Jesus's challenge to the powers of this age is not only political but also a transformation of what most mean by "politics."

The character of Jesus's politics is manifest in his response to the high priest who questions Jesus about his teachings in John 18:19-24. That he is questioned by the high priest may suggest that his mission was "religious" rather than political, but such an account cannot be sustained for no other reason than Jesus's answer: "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always

taught in the synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said." Politics is speech and Jesus is at once the speech, the word of the Father, and the speaker. Nothing is hidden because the kingdom Jesus brings in his person is open to all.

Frustrated by Jesus's response, the priests take Jesus to Pilate. There can be no ambiguity about the political challenge Jesus represents before Pilate. Pilate is Roman authority; he is an authority who has the power to determine whether those who appear before Roman governors live or die. Pilate obviously does not like the position in which he has been placed by those who bring Jesus before him. Jesus's accusers, however, indicate Jesus is obviously guilty—otherwise why would they have Jesus appear before Pilate? But Pilate refuses to be bullied, so he examines Jesus.

He begins in an inquiring fashion: "They tell me that you are the King of Jews. Is that true?" Pilate's question is obviously meant to see if Jesus is "political." Jesus responds by asking if Pilate came up with such a view on his own or did others tell him such was the case. "I am not a Jew, am I?" replies Pilate. To which Jesus responds, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." This is a response used often to deny that Jesus was political.

But note that Pilate understood what Jesus was saying. "So you are a king?" Pilate rightly saw that Jesus's denial that his kingship was not of this world is not the denial that Jesus is king. No, Jesus denied that his kingdom was just another form of Rome. Jesus's kingdom is not like other kingdoms of this world, but rather his kingdom is one that is an alternative to the kingdoms of this world. Jesus does not deny he is a king, but rather says, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." (John 18:37) Pilate responds the way the world must respond when so confronted, that is, with worldly cynicism: "What is truth?"

The truth, of course, is that the Father has sent his Son so that we—that is, the church—might be an alternative politics, a politics of truth, to that of the world. The world's politics is based on violence, believed necessary given the absence of truth. It is kill or be killed. That is the politics that has been overwhelmed in Christ's death and resurrection. A people have been created through the work of the Spirit to be an alternative politics to the politics of the lie—lies so blatant that we believe they must be true as otherwise they are so absurd—lies that lead us to believe that "peace" can be achieved through war.



In his *The Original Revolution*, John Howard Yoder helps us understand the political character of the salvation wrought in Christ.

"The kingdom of God is at hand: repent and believe the good news!" To repent is not to feel bad but to think differently. Protestantism, and perhaps especially evangelical Protestantism, in its concern for helping every individual to make his own authentic choice in full awareness and sincerity, is in constant danger of confusing the kingdom itself with the benefits of the kingdom. If anyone repents, if anyone turns around to follow Jesus in his new way of life, this will do something for the aimlessness of his life. It will do something for his loneliness by giving him fellowship. It will do something for his anxiety and guilt by giving him a good conscience. So the Bultmanns and the Grahams whose "evangelism" is to proclaim the offer of restored selfhood, liberation from anxiety and guilt, are not wrong. If anyone repents, it will do something for his intellectual confusion by giving him doctrinal meat to digest, a heritage to appreciate, and conscience about telling it all as it is: So "evangelicalism" with its concern for hallowed truth and reasoned communication is not wrong; it is right. If a man repents it will do something for his moral weakness by giving him the focus for wholesome self-discipline, it will keep him from immorality and get him to work on time. So the Peales and the Robertses who promise that God cares about helping me squeeze through the tight spots of life are not wrong; they have their place. *But all this is not the Gospel.*<sup>2</sup>

The Gospel is the proclamation of a new age begun through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That Gospel, moreover, has a form, a political form. It is embodied in a church that is required to be always ready to give hospitality to the stranger. The Gospel is a society in which difference is not denied but used for the discovery of goods in common. It is, as Yoder observes, a society called into being by Jesus who gave them a new way to live.

He gave them a new way to deal with offenders—by forgiving them. He gave them a new way to deal with violence—by suffering. He gave them a new way to deal with money—by sharing it. He gave them a new way to deal with problems of leadership—by drawing on the gift of every member, even the most humble. He gave them a new way to deal with a corrupt society—by building a new order, not making the old. He gave them a new pattern of relationships between man and woman,

<sup>2</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald, 1972), 31-32.



between parent and child, between master and slave, in which was made concrete a radical new vision of what it means to be a human person. He gave them a new attitude toward the state and toward the "enemy nation."<sup>3</sup>

That is the politics begun in Christ. That is the "good news," that is, we have been freed from the presumed necessities that we inflict on ourselves in the name of "peace," a peace that too often turns out to be an order established and continued through violence. Is it any wonder that Jesus was despised and rejected? Is it any wonder when the Church is faithful to Christ that she finds herself persecuted and condemned? Yet if such a church does not exist, the world has no alternative to the violence hidden in our fear of one another.

#### RESURRECTION

Some may say that with all the talk above about death I seem to have forgotten the resurrection. The Father raised Jesus from the dead. Surely that is what Christianity is about—securing eternal life. All the talk about the "politics of Jesus" fails to recognize that the work Jesus did was to make it possible for us to enjoy God forever. I certainly have no reason to deny that we have an eternal destiny made possible by Jesus's good work, but too often I fear the stress on "eternal life" spiritualizes the work of Christ. As a result, the political character of Jesus's resurrection is lost.

Too often I think Christians think about the resurrection in terms of a story told by Søren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard's story begins by telling us about a prince riding through his field. The prince sees a peasant girl gathering the crops. She is beautiful and the prince falls instantly in love with her. However, he is a noble prince and does not want to overwhelm her with his power and riches, so he dresses in peasant clothes and goes to work side by side with her. Kierkegaard notes that what holds our attention as such a story is told is our curiosity about when the prince will show his true identity. We know the prince and the peasant girl will fall in love. After all, she is beautiful and he is noble so we know they will love one another. But we want to know when and how the prince will reveal to his beloved that she has fallen in love with the prince himself.

We let our imaginations run. Perhaps one day they share a lunch during which he tells her of his love. She confesses she also loves him and suddenly he rips back the peasant clothes and reveals the purple. Or perhaps he will

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

wait until the wedding itself. They exchange vows at the end of which he tears away his rough clothes to reveal that through this marriage she has become the queen of the land. If we are really letting our imaginations run, we might think he waits until the wedding night itself.

Kierkegaard uses this story to suggest that we think the resurrection must be like a prince who has been hiding the purple under his rough clothes. The resurrection reveals the purple. However, Kierkegaard notes the only problem with so thinking of the resurrection is that Jesus has no purple under his flesh. Jesus is peasant clothes, flesh, all the way down. He is not playing at being a human. He is human all the way down. The resurrected Christ is the crucified Christ.

Only such a Christ, moreover, can save us. For Jesus is the Christ, being for us this particular man making possible a particular way of life that is an alternative to the world's fear of one like Jesus. Christians have no fantasy that we may get out of life alive. Instead we have a savior who was in every way like us, yet also fully God. Jesus is not 50 percent God and 50 percent man. He is 100 percent God and 100 percent man, he is the incarnation making possible a way to live that constitutes an alternative to all politics that are little less than conspiracies to deny death.

Such a savior does not promise that by being his follower we will be made safe. Rather, this savior offers to free us from our self-inflicted fears and anxieties. Jesus does so not by making our lives "more meaningful," though we may discover our lives have renewed purpose, but by making us members of his body and blood so that we can share in the goods of a community that is an alternative to the world. Do not, thereby, be surprised that as followers of Christ you may be hated and rejected, but you have been given such wonderful work that I suspect you will hardly notice that you are so.

#### A FINAL WORD TO THE YOUNG

I have no way to know how you have heard or read what I have tried to say. I recognize that in some ways what you have heard is, as one of my graduate students once observed, a "completely different Christianity." I have no interest in being different to be different. Instead, I hope you will find this account of the Gospel compelling. People are dying to be part of an adventure that will give us a worthy task. I think the Gospel is such an adventure. I hope what I have said at least gives you a glimpse of what a wonderful life you have been given through your baptism.

# The Art of Reading the Bible: An Art for Everyone?

by GERHARD SAUTER

*This lecture was delivered in 2000, as part of the Princeton Theological Seminary's annual Warfield Lecture series, by Dr. Gerhard Santer, Professor of Systematic and Ecumenical Theology and Director Emeritus of the Ecumenical Institute in the Faculty of Protestant Theology at the University of Bonn, Germany. The lectures were published in 2007 by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, as Protestant Theology at the Crossroads: How to Face the Crucial Tasks for Theology in the Twenty-First Century. This excerpt has been printed with permission of the publisher; all rights reserved.*

Often I remind my students what an immensely precious gift it is that we are privileged to read the Scripture of the Jewish community as a part of “our” Bible, of the canon of the Christian church. We are invited to read it, to be involved in the story told there, even to pray the treasure of prayers that it contains. For us as for Jews it is not merely an ancient document of religious literature that may be interesting for comparative religious studies. Here we listen to the living Word of God, full of promises also for us.

My father, a minister and a member of the Confessing Church resisting the Nazi regime, was very concerned about the terrible loss of the Old Testament for the preaching, religious education, and biblical studies of the German church. There were not only anti-Jewish, racist polemics against the Old Testament, but also, since the nineteenth century, theological prejudices that blamed the early church for keeping the Old Testament in the canon. With his small salary, my father bought all the Old Testament studies he could get in the 1930s; we even found in his bookshelves a Jewish prayer book, after his very early death in 1945. Some of his most precious treasures were the recent critical edition of the *Biblica Hebraica* and the Septuagint. During the war, when we had to go in the basement of the house because of the bombing, we always had to take these books with us to keep them from being destroyed. Mostly there was no electric power; we thus had to use candles. Some of these books with their candle stains are now in my study, and whenever I read them I am reminded of a time when it seemed most unlikely that the Old Testament would enrich the German church again.

After World War Two, especially in the 1950s, Old Testament studies were the most vivid and challenging inquiries in German Protestant theol-

ogy. There was a revival of interest in the story and history told by the Old Testament. But some prejudices remained. In 1965 I delivered my second thesis in theology (*Habilitationsschrift*) and a research lecture to the faculty of theology of the University of Göttingen. One member of the faculty opposed my graduation for teaching theology on the grounds that "He is not a Christian theologian, because he is too much rooted in the Old Testament."

Can we read the Old Testament without prejudice? Again, there is a fork in the road: Do we read the Old Testament only as historical precondition of the Christ event—or do we really listen to it expecting to hear the voice of "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Mark 12:26), the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead? There is a story in the New Testament that deals with this exact question.

"Do you understand what you are reading?" With this question Philip, the wandering preacher, greets the Ethiopian treasury official. The official—according to the story in Acts 8:26–39—is on his way home from Jerusalem. He is reading a passage from the prophet Isaiah about a man who was sacrificed. "Do you understand what you are reading?" This is how Philip interrupts the official, unasked, as he reads out loud; and the official, who is obviously not at all embarrassed, admits that he does not understand: "How can I, unless someone explains it to me?"<sup>1</sup> He needs to be helped on his way—his chariot travels onward but he, the traveler, is unable to move from the spot in his reading. Philip explains the passage, and in such a way that it flows seamlessly into the sermon about Christ. The consequence of this good news is the baptism of the treasurer; having been baptized, he goes on his way rejoicing, having taken this decisive step in his life.

Do *we*, too, understand what we read in this passage? I can only touch upon different interpretations here: Is it the story of a conversion, on the pattern of a surprise attack that even people of high standing cannot escape?<sup>2</sup> (This interpretation has an additional nice point: that even a secretary of the treasury, of all people, cannot understand what he is reading to himself, even if it is just a devout text!) Or is it an example of early Christian mission, with the particular nuance that it is a God-fearing heathen who is received into the Christian church?<sup>3</sup> Are we given an early instance of the Christian commu-

<sup>1</sup> NRSV: "How can I, unless someone guides me?"

<sup>2</sup> Johann Albrecht Bengel, *Gnomon Novi Testamenti*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Johann Heinrich Philipp Schramm, 1759), 498: "Mira allocutio ad ignotum eumque magnum hominem. In sancta conversatione sine circuitu agendum de re ipsa" [A peculiar address to an unfamiliar and distinguished man as well. In a spiritual dialogue one must right away and straight come to the matter].

<sup>3</sup> Jürgen Roloff, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 139.



nity making use of prophetic texts for its preaching about Christ?<sup>4</sup> Or, to use the same interpretation but in a different and critical way: Are we shown an example of Jews having their holy traditions wrested from them by Christians—what Friedrich Nietzsche denounced as a crying injustice and a conscious misunderstanding of the highest degree? Nietzsche wrote: “[W]hat can be expected from the effects of a religion, which, during the centuries when it was being firmly established, enacted that huge philological farce concerning the Old Testament? I refer to that attempt to tear the Old Testament from the hands of the Jews under the pretext that it contained only Christian doctrines and *belonged* to the Christians as the true people of Israel, while the Jews had merely arrogated it to themselves without authority.”<sup>5</sup>

Is the *interpretatio christiana*, the Christian interpretation, a robbery of the suffering servant of God, a new chapter in his suffering?

Yet these interpretations, however convincing and vigorous each one may be in itself, do not fully explore one aspect of the story: that the course of events is structured by the intervention of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who sends Philip to the spot, puts the Ethiopian in his path and finally takes him away, leaving the new Christian to go on his way alone, but not lonely. Is this how the main thread of events is formed? Is it not moved forward again and again by a *Spiritus ex machina*, a Spirit who appears like a theatrical effect, and does it thus gain a supernatural character?

Whether this is the case or not is probably decisive in our understanding of what we read. It seems to me that the interventions of the Spirit mark turning points in the narrative and interrupt the plot. We are stopped from simply going further. We have to pause—and to listen. Such interruptions put the question to us even more urgently: Do we really understand what we read there?

The structure of the text, it seems to me, points in this latter direction. Or even more provocatively: the text asks us how we are involved here. Two men come together under God’s influence. What one of them tells the other of Christ draws the other into a text with an open meaning. Philip suggests this “way of reading” to the treasury official: he claims that the suffering servant

<sup>4</sup> Roloff (Ibid., 141) and Rudolf Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Zürich: Benziger; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1986), 292–93, draw attention to textual changes in the quotation from Isaiah that facilitate a christological interpretation.

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Philology of Christianity,” in *The Dawn of Day*, trans. J. M. Kennedy, in *Works*, vol. 9 (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), 84–86; quotation is from p. 85. Compare this verdict with Philip’s question, which, besides, is formulated as a play on words (“*ginoskein*—*anaginoskein*”), to link “understanding” and “reading.” Nietzsche makes use of parody.



of God stands for Jesus Christ, crucified and resurrected. The official understands this, and moreover, he receives the message of the prophet as a call to be baptized. He transfers himself into the ownership of Jesus Christ and (as is added by v.37, a textual variant handed down in a part of Western tradition) professes his faith in Christ. Clearly, this is not based on a convincing recalling of the ancient text into the present that could be added to Philip's credentials as an interpreter. Rather, Jesus Christ, the suffering servant of God, meets the reader—first of all the official as he reads, but furthermore everyone who reads the story. Jesus Christ has not left behind some lasting influence that could have proceeded directly from Jesus' life. Jesus Christ established a tradition of proclaiming and receiving his message, his work, and his presence in such a way that he provided that we encounter Christ himself. In the power of the Spirit, through God alone, Jesus Christ brings about faith and creates his body of followers. In this respect the prophetic text is identified. Luke, who composed the Acts of the Apostles, indicates that this happens through the power of God's Spirit—and yet what is crucial is kept *open* precisely by this indication. If I wanted to read this story completely, I would really have to pause, in total silence, every time the Spirit was mentioned, and I would certainly be unable to read past those places. Or—in much the same way—I would have to emphasize the central points of the plot in such a way that my attention was drawn to what remains unsaid.

In his essay "Odysseus' Scar," the literary scholar Erich Auerbach characterizes the difference in style between biblical narrative and Homer's epic poetry. He characterizes Old Testament narratives as follows:

The externalization of only so much of the phenomena as is necessary for the purpose of the narrative, all else left in obscurity; the decisive points of the narrative alone are emphasized, what lies between is nonexistent; time and place are undefined and call for interpretation; thoughts and feeling remain unexpressed, are only suggested by the silence and the fragmentary speeches; the whole, permeated with the most unrelieved suspense and directed toward a single goal (and to that extent far more of a unity), remains mysterious and "fraught with background."<sup>6</sup>

In the story of the Ethiopian official, too, only a few moments appear in the text: reading and its complications, preaching and baptism. How events move from reading to believing is neither said nor explained at all. This is a

<sup>6</sup> Erich Auerbach, "Odysseus' Scar," in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 11–12.

gap—and this is where the reader comes into play: the treasury official as a reader, and we, too, the readers of his story.

Perhaps Luke, as a Hellenistic author, is operating on the border between Old Testament storytelling and Greek epic narrative with its clear conclusiveness. Some suspect that his understanding of the Spirit indicates this transition to a hidden rationalization: God's Spirit as the director of salvation history, if not even as the puppet master in the background.<sup>7</sup> And yet the intervention of the Spirit in fact explains nothing, but makes it clear that the story does not develop from within itself, that is, from the motives and opportunities of the people involved in it.

So it is with the question "Do you understand what you are reading?" that the question how understanding is constituted and constructed is first raised. The answer can be seen in the official's wish to be baptized: understanding has the same origin as faith, and the reception of faith is recognized in baptism. They have the same origin: both originate at the same time, they are there together, one does not come after the other, neither can be derived from the other, and even so, a difference is drawn between them. And they refer to each other: the text allows itself to be understood, and the reader comes to believe. The whole story is told in such a way as to *bring the reader into play*, in a still inexplicit way, *when the text is read*.

This notion of "being in the story too" is marked precisely by the fact that any transition from reading to baptism is *not* described. Without faith it would be impossible to read what can be read. Faith does not work like a pair of glasses, however, that allows us to decode the text; glasses can be taken on and off. Faith, on the other hand, is constitutive, like the retina, which makes sight possible in the first place but can only cast an image of what is real!

For the early father Jerome, who translated the Greek Bible into Latin or revised existing translations, this story was the key story for the art of reading the Bible, the *ars scripturarum*.<sup>8</sup> In one of his letters from when he was working on the translation, sent to a certain Paulinus, he writes that we naturally need instruction in all branches of science, arts, and technology. But it is only when reading the Bible that everyone thinks it is possible to get by without a teacher: "It is to the art of interpreting Scripture, and none other, that everybody feels a calling." (In comparison, Jerome attacks poetasters,

<sup>7</sup> Roloff, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 139: "Philippus ist nur ausführendes Organ in einem Geschehen, bei dem der Geist selbst Regie führt" [Philip is only the executive in an event directed by the Spirit]; Ernst Haenchen, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 7th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 304, speaks of "*providentia specialissima*," a very special providence.

<sup>8</sup> Jerome, "Epistula 53: Ad Paulinum presbyterum" 5f., in Saint Jérôme, *Lettres*, vol. 3, ed. Jérôme Labourt (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1953), 14–15.

would-be poets, with a quotation from Horace: "We all occasionally write poetry, whether we can do it or not.")<sup>9</sup> Written around 395, this letter served for centuries as the preface to all editions of the Vulgate, the Latin translation of the Bible.

Now we have to ask about the content of the instruction that the official requests and that is granted to him: the official discovers himself as a part of the text. The reader belongs alongside the suffering servant of God; he is placed at the cross at Golgotha; he is led to the empty grave and he perceives Christ raised from the dead. So the act of reading suddenly turns into preaching about Christ and is fulfilled with the request to be baptized. *The text reads the reader.* And what was right for the official should be true for all following readers of the story. For the official's reading is and remains a highly involved process. And likewise, if you and I as readers of this story want to understand it, then we basically face it with as questioning a stance as the official before the text from Isaiah—even if Luke intended to give a few hints to help us understand it. We "know" the Christ story and are familiar with the Gospel; therefore, we are in fact not in the same position as the Ethiopian. But what do we really know? The Christ story opens us up for reading the Scriptures, the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. Reading the narratives or listening to narrated stories, we experience that we are involved and how we are incorporated. Does the prophetic message tell us the story of Christ calling for faith? This is not at all evident if we stick only to the text. The story embedded in the text does not go out of our sight like the official. It calls us just as the traveler from Ethiopia, even when we were baptized.

The official's reading in no way ends with his being baptized. He "went on his way rejoicing." It is not left to the whims of our imagination to think what further reading lies before him. True enough, our imagination is stimulated by the story, but at the same time it is formed in a particular way—even if it is not set fast. Continuing to tell the story means, at the same time, to perceive how the storyteller and the listener are embraced by it, how they become involved in it, the same as Philip and the Ethiopian. It is not simply a continuation, but rather a penetrative reading.

Therefore, the story does not invite us to go on in our own storytelling. Rather, we perceive ourselves as a part of the story of God acting on and with his people, with humanity, and with the world. We are not encouraged to develop further stories out of it and "read" an abundance of other possible

<sup>9</sup> Jerome, "Epistula 53: Ad Paulinum presbyterum" 7: "Sola scripturarum ars est, quam sibi omnes passim vindicant: 'scribimus indocti doctique poemata passim,'" *Lettres*, 15.

stories “out” of this text, rather “into the text”—including stories in which we seem to be caught up. These kinds of continuations can easily lead to schematic repetitions. Then, segments of the narrative are recited, which are used as clichés for other stories. The characters in the plot are substituted, bringing their story with them, but reducing it in key places to the common denominator, which is already known. Christian devotional literature contains fatal examples. How often pious people claim having experienced the shock of Paul on the road to Damascus understood as a conversion experience that allows continuous glances back at the wrong, “old” life! How often was Luther’s reformatory discovery of the justification only by faith and his subsequent resistance against the authority of the oppressive church officials stylized as a model for total independence of the religious subjectivity immediate to God!

To read biblical texts—not only stories, but also prayers, advice, visions, wisdom literature, letters—as parts of an overarching *bidden* story provides the surprise that we discover ourselves as being read in the story. This is one of the advantages of a sound *narrative theology*:<sup>10</sup> a decisive step forward in the manifold and often conflicting ways of using the Scripture.<sup>11</sup> I can only touch this concept and must leave aside its often debated disadvantages. In short, narrative theology may help us to perceive Scripture as a treasure entrusted to us. “Faithful interpretation of Scripture invites and presupposes participation in the community brought into being by God’s redemptive action—the church.”<sup>12</sup> In listening to Scripture while “interpreting,” the reader discovers himself or herself as being opened to the message of Scripture. It does not at all contradict, but fruitfully contrasts, the many attempts to open the text, that is, to fill or at least to bridge the enormous temporal and cultural gap between the time when the text was conceived and the time of the reader—our time. Especially that has been elaborated by hermeneutics, which operates with the correlation of past and present time to translate, rather to transfer, the text into the present. It was a long and difficult way from the defense of the infallibility of all biblical texts and of their sufficiency

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Garrett Green, ed., *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); John Barton and Gerhard Sauter, eds., *Revelation and Story: Narrative Theology and the Centrality of Story* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> See David A. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

<sup>12</sup> Thesis 6, “Nine Theses on the Interpretation of Scripture,” in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 3. See also as an instructive collection of essays of pastor-theologians: William H. Lazareth, ed., *Reading the Bible in Faith: Theological Voices from the Pastorate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).



for all knowledge in the "Princeton Theology"<sup>13</sup> or in the rigid conservative Lutheran "System" that Richard Lischer portrays so impressively,<sup>14</sup> toward *the perception of the biblical canon as the story of the triune God acting on and with humanity and on the world—involving us into his story*. When the early church consented to the canon, it understood in a new way what it means to be the church: perceiving the Scripture as a dramatic whole that tells the story of the triune God, the story of creation, salvation, and consummation.<sup>15</sup>

Today we ask and are asked: Why do we search in the Scriptures? Why do we read the Bible at all? Indeed, why do we not just turn to it now and then, when we need some information, or perhaps even instruction, to put pressure on those who are not of our own "Bible-believing" persuasion?

Searching in Scripture is not just looking up references to reinforce opinions and prior knowledge, or using it as a book of oracles. Whoever really searches in Scripture hopes that, in the process of searching, God will make himself heard. Therefore "you search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf," says Jesus (John 5:39).

When I served in the ministry, I got to know an engaged couple. They wanted their wedding text to be, "Do justice and fear no one." Unquestionably, that is an appealing proverb, but it does not occur anywhere in the Bible. Was it out of the question then to use it for the wedding ceremony? I could have found a way out by suggesting a Bible verse that sounds similar, something like Deuteronomy 6:18, "Do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, so that it may go well with you." Yet when I asked why they chose that particular saying, it soon became clear that the betrothed wanted to hear a wise rule of life—this motto of sincerity—endorsed just once in a solemn setting. They wanted to use this rule to bind their relationship with each other. They wanted to promise each other that neither would do anything that would have to be hidden from the other.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Mark A. Noll, ed., *The Princeton Theology, 1821–1921: Scripture, Science, and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983); Mark A. Noll, ed., *The Princeton Defense of Plenary Verbal Inspiration* (New York: Garland, 1988).

<sup>14</sup> Richard Lischer, *Open Secrets: A Memoir of Faith and Discovery* (New York: Broadway Books, 2002), 25–26.

<sup>15</sup> I suggest that we would value the Bible much more if we remember what a tough and troublesome process it was to form the canon. To give just a hint how costly this treasure is: in Poland after the Counter-Reformation, Protestants had a very difficult time and often could meet for worship only in the woods. As a rule, the oldest son of a farmer inherited the farm and the next oldest the family Bible: the farm and the Bible were considered to be of nearly the same value.



What can be said against that? Nothing, except the kind of confidence that would have to be placed in such a promise! This couple was trying to base their confidence on their constancy, each on its own and on that of the other. This is what they hoped for, continually to remain true to each other. On the contrary, the Old Testament commandment, however much it wants to impress similar behavior upon us, places what is right and good under the direction and promise of God. What people promise each other as a result rests on God's promise of faithfulness. In God's promise, human promises of faithfulness find their support, and in this alone their future is rooted.

The couple might have chosen the Old Testament verse "Do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord" instead of their slogan for a confident lifestyle, "Do justice and fear no one." But they may still have understood the biblical verse in just the same way: as a rule of life.

Those who seem to "choose" God's Word profess that they are addressed by it in an incomparable way. With this profession they may wish to confirm what they have already heard in other ways and therefore "know," but now they let it be promised to them anew. In this way they place themselves under the Bible. In contrast with much selective listening—not to mention selective exhortation—one must be prepared for surprises, even disturbing experiences, if one appeals to the Bible.

#### EVERY READER AN ARTIST?

This puts us only a small distance away from reception theory (*Rezeptionsästhetik*)—similar to the reader/response criticism that started in the United States. This flourishing branch of contemporary literary studies steers our understanding of texts, their reception and circulation, in a different direction: it is not only the "message" of the text that counts, or even just the intention of the author that has to be deduced by many different means of reconstruction. Rather, the recipients expose themselves to the structure of the text, and that is how the text is read to the full, with a long-lasting effect. Poetic texts in particular, read as works of art, lead themselves naturally to the "art of reading." The reader becomes involved in what he makes out to be the text, in accordance with the Swiss proverb: "The good spectator joins in with the work" [Ein guter Zuschauer schafft mit]. Above all, it is the vacancies and broken strands in the text that awaken the reader's imagination and tempt him to continue the story himself and to find himself within it.

So far I am referring essentially to Wolfgang Iser's essay *The Act of Reading*<sup>16</sup> and to his observations of the perception of texts.<sup>17</sup> According to Iser, vacancies (*Leerstellen*) or missing links are "a condition of communicating the text." They mark out "the collision of textual patterns, by omitting these patterns' connectability."<sup>18</sup> The thing to do is precisely not to fill these vacancies but to leave them open, so that the pattern of the text as such is visible. And this comes about if we take their essentially perspectival nature into account: "A literary text is a perspectival connection to objectivity. . . . In narrative literature, a perspectival connection arises from a series of changing and interwoven perspectives. . . . Now, in the reading process, the reader will never stay in all these perspectives at the same time, but will always glance over from one to the other, and will change perspective several times during the process of reading. From these changes of perspective, the imaginary object is constructed as an idea in the reception-consciousness."<sup>19</sup>

Thus the reader does not meet an original meaning that must be determined by all the means known to philological archaeology or empathy to be communicated to the present day. There is no meaning, assumed to be contained within the text, that must be "found out," salvaged and decoded. (In contrast to the assumption of hermeneutics, too, such a meaning cannot be decoded by a fictitious dialogue between the reader and the author through a text, where both communicate on their self-understanding or another basic point of view and probe the question more and more deeply.) Iser writes in "Die Appellstruktur der Texte":

If it really were the case, as the "Art of Interpretation" would have us believe, that the meaning is hidden in the text itself, then the question is why texts play hide-and-seek with interpreters in such a way; and even more, why meanings, once they are found, change again, although the letters, words and sentences of the text stay the same. Doesn't a method

<sup>16</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

<sup>17</sup> Wolfgang Iser, "Die Appellstruktur der Texte: Unbestimmtheit als Wirkungsbedingung literarischer Prosa" (The appellative structure of texts: Inexactness as a condition of effect in literary prose), in *Rezeptionsästhetik, Theorie und Praxis*, ed. R. Warning, 2nd ed. (Munich, 1979), 228-52; Wolfgang Iser, "Im Lichte der Kritik," in *Rezeptionsästhetik*, 325-42. Umberto Eco notes observations in a similar direction in his critical review of the interpretation of his essay "Das offene Kunstwerk" (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977) in *Lector in fabula* (Munich: Fink, 1990). For much of the following, I am grateful to Dr. Rainer Fischer, who wrote his thesis on *Die Kunst des Bibellesens* (The art of reading the Bible): *Theologische Ästhetik am Beispiel des Schriftverständnisses*, Beiträge zur theologischen Urteilsbildung, vol. 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> Iser, "Im Lichte der Kritik," 326.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

of interpretation which looks for the deeper meaning of texts begin, at that point, to mystify them, and thus cancel out its own declared aim, to clarify and illuminate the texts?<sup>20</sup>

Everybody who is acquainted with the history of biblical interpretation—even sketchily—knows plenty of such charades played by texts that clearly elude their interpreters as they, in turn, try to grasp and hold on to their meaning. Why?

To pursue that I confine myself to discussing *the vacancies that reception theory judges to be a constitutive element of the art of reading*. These vacancies are similar to the cuts of a film: the more drastic they are, the greater the demands they make on our imagination. Our involvement in the action is indispensable, for it is not meant just to be played out in front of us, as if we could simply shake it off after watching it. A form of interaction takes place between the picture and the viewer, comparable to the interaction between the text and the reader.

Theologians have also taken up the motif of the vacancy, though in a way that misuses the insights of reception theory. In his article "The Art of Reading the Bible Today," the practical theologian Rainer Volp refers to Iser's definition of vacancies. Iser wrote: "Whenever a segment becomes a theme, the previous one must lose its thematic relevance and be turned into a marginal, thematically vacant position, which can be and usually is occupied by the reader, so that he may focus on the new thematic segment."<sup>21</sup>

Volp reads this as if these vacancies, if not filled, should still be put into use, by means of free combinatorial analysis and creative associations. "These vacancies are something like the joint between the changing perspectives when we read."<sup>22</sup> According to Volp, it is a matter of keeping these joints movable, and therefore not stiffening them with dogmatic prescripts or basic theological subjects. On the contrary, Iser separates exactly this arbitrary choice of a projected "experience from life" from the perspective envisaged in the structure of texts.<sup>23</sup> This perspective opens us up to the *aesthetic quality* of the text—a quality that does not want to be observed but that attracts us, inviting us to be really at home here, enriched and "informed," even trans-

<sup>20</sup> Iser, "Die Appellstruktur der Texte," 229.

<sup>21</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 198.

<sup>22</sup> Rainer Volp, "Die Kunst, heute die Bibel zu lesen: Zum Umgang mit der Bibel in einem nachliterarischen Zeitalter," *Pastoraltheologie* 74 (1985): 294–311; quotation is from p. 300 n. 17.

<sup>23</sup> Iser, "Im Lichte der Kritik," 327.

formed by its trustworthy beauty, even if this quality is often subtle, sometimes very dramatic and therefore often first disturbing or even frightening.<sup>24</sup>

If the reader—or in the case of a sermon, the listener<sup>25</sup>—is supposed to have a part in deciding what a text has to say, reception theory becomes a vehicle for emancipation: for liberation from everything that has been thought or said before, for the examination of heteronomy, for freeing oneself from the prejudices of the texts, and for a call to participate in the business of reading. Here the only question may be whether it is at least a matter of an equal participation, arranged between the author, the text, and the reader. But can we honestly still speak of “art” in this case? In music, for example, such participation would be regarded as ridiculous. It cannot be negotiated between the score, the artist, and the listener. Of course, the score is not in itself the music, the interpreters do re-create the sound at the moment they play, and therefore they intensely participate in it. Even the listeners take a certain part in forming what they hear, in their own and often different ways. This participation does not dominate, but rather serves and receives; its concern is to be shaped rather than to form; otherwise the work of art would be deformed or even destroyed. The same is true for the art of reading.

Volp confuses the impact of the reader with the process of receiving. His method of reading does not exhaust the possibilities for dialogue with reception theory. His understanding leads to the demand on all readers to become artists (according to the maxim “every reader is an artist”). It would be far more fruitful theologically to learn from structural observations, so as to invite the reader to be drawn into the events of the text. Declaring the reader to be an artist, who participates in creating the work of art to which he subjects himself, demands too much—even if, as is surely true, much more creative potential does lie dormant in us, undiscovered.

Concern about overexertion of this kind may have been the essential element in the “reading barrier” or “reading fence” (*Lesezaun*) the church erected around the Bible for a long time. The question behind the ban on “laypeople” reading the Bible can be formulated in this way today: “Can someone who has no knowledge of literature perform so difficult a reading

<sup>24</sup> For the Old Testament, see Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Albrecht Beutel, “Offene Predigt: Homiletische Bemerkungen zu Sprache und Sache,” *Pastoraltheologie* 77 (1988): 518–37, esp. p. 524: “Der Rezipient entscheidet darüber, was das Rezipierte für ihn ist” [The recipient decides what has been received], that is, what he or she thinks discloses meaning for him or her.



task as constructing an old text by reading?"<sup>26</sup> Luther translated the Bible into German not for the people as recognition of their vernacular language (which did not even exist then as a standardized language), but as a form of instruction for pastors and heads of families. In no way did he want to withhold the Bible from the "laity," but he would never have wanted to put it in their hands without instructions, that is, without preaching and catechism.

To return to the comparison of textual vacancies with film sequences: we are also familiar with cuts that are simply meant to interrupt a film, in order to fit in a commercial break. Something crucial is just beginning to emerge, and we are whisked off to the day-to-day problems of dog food, types of coffee, and detergent that washes whiter than white. What a treacherous murder of aesthetics! If the "vacancies" in the text are to be used as opportunities to switch from one perspective of reality to another, then art falls by the wayside. People fall with it, in the long term, as too much is asked of their constitution and, overstrained, they fall prey to control from outside. This is what can happen when vacancies are to be "allocated" and "reallocated" by the readers and their changing perspectives rather than by an external authority. Today, the attraction of reception theory rests for many on this misunderstanding. Such a reception of reception theory demands the question, "Do you also read what you think you have understood?"

#### ILLUMINATING SCRIPTURE THROUGH SCRIPTURE—THE TRUE ART<sup>27</sup>

To read the Bible right is an art, much more than a skillful reciting. It is "a creative discipline that requires engagement and imagination."<sup>28</sup> This art is applied to biblical texts as canonical writings and at the same time to theological tools, which prepare the reader to leave space for God to speak his own word, rather than hinder the hearing of this word.

<sup>26</sup> Walter Magaß, "11 Thesen zum Bibellesen—und zum 'Suchen' in der Schrift (John 5:39)," *Linguistica Biblica* 47 (1980): 5–20, quotation is from p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> See Martin Luther, *Auf das überchristlich, übergeistlich und überkünstlich Buch Bock Emser zu Leipzig Antwort* (Dr. Martin Luther's Answer to the Superchristian, Superspiritual, and Superlearned Book of Goat Emser of Leipzig) (1521): "schriff mit schriff erleuchten und außlegen" [to illuminate and interpret Scripture through Scripture], in *Martin Luthers Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, vol. 7, ed. Paul Pietsch (Weimar: Böhlau, 1897), 639, "und das ist auch die rechte kunst, das man die schriff recht und wol zusammen trage" [and this is also the proper art of rightly and adequately bringing together Scripture], that is, to correlate different parts of Scripture to achieve a consistent understanding. A. Steimle translates: "interpret and explain Scripture by Scripture" and "and this is the true method of interpretation which puts Scripture alongside of Scripture in a right and proper way" (in *Works of Martin Luther*, vol. 3 [Philadelphia: Holman and Castle: 1930], 334).

<sup>28</sup> Davis and Hays, *Art of Reading Scripture*, xv.



This is so broad a topic that I can only outline it here. In our context, “canonical” means *to know something about the Bible that we cannot manage on our own authority—and to learn to read with this aporia*. Theological aporias are distinct descriptions of what we need to know as the contours of the “secrets of faith,” for example, “mysteries” in the language of the apostle Paul (Rom. 11:25; 1 Cor. 15:51) or the christological definition of Chalcedon about the unity of God and humanity in Jesus Christ (451 AD). They are “disclosures” for faith and hope, but only in a way that we are called to receive their promise and to follow this promise, even in our thinking experiences, and therefore they remain tasks for our rationality.<sup>29</sup> The secret of understanding consists in reading the Bible as the form of address and the self-announcement of God. This is an art, which does not claim and make demands on the “creative,” and does not simply exhaust itself in a variety performance of associations. It is not an art that has to do with human skill and ability. Rather, art in our sense has to do with a certain, limited form of knowledge. It is not the same as *ars* in the classical sense, a rule-bound and practiced skill, but it does not stand in stark contrast to it either.

Faithfulness to Scripture takes account of the fact that the church confirmed, in the process of canon formation, what had been impressed upon it—God’s faithfulness, disclosed in a *wide variety of perspectives of expectation* in the Scriptures. These perspectives cannot be traced back to one another; nor can they be modeled after one another. They engage with each other in such a way that perception never comes to an end.<sup>30</sup> The textual level contains several vanishing points, which draw attention to themselves in such a way that the view is repeatedly directed anew toward other texts, yet without losing the unity of the whole. Consistency and openness are not mutually exclusive here; the perception is neither arbitrary nor fully traced out. For example, Hans Urs von Balthasar inquires in view of the “four-fold form of the Gospel” whether the “unique, divine plasticity of the living, incarnate Word” could be otherwise attested “than through this system of perspectives which, although it cannot be further synthesized, compensates for this by offering a stereoscopic vista.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore, to see the Bible right *as Scripture*, i.e., as a complex whole with all its dimensions, we need a comprehensive *art of reading* the Scripture.

<sup>29</sup> See Gerhard Sauter, *Wissenschaftstheoretische Kritik der Theologie: Die Theologie und die neuere wissenschaftstheoretische Diskussion* (Munich: Christian Kaiser, 1973), 355.

<sup>30</sup> Rowan Williams, “The Discipline of Scripture,” in *On Christian Theology: Challenges in Contemporary Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 44–59.

<sup>31</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 1, *Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Herikakis, ed. Joseph Fessio and John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982), 32.

Experiences in perceiving the variety of perspectives of expectation are based on three elementary distinctions that arise out of the canon taken as a whole, but that have, at the same time, proved themselves to be "instructions for readers," perspectives of their own kind, which are clasped together but cannot be confused with each other or brought down to a common denominator. Precisely in this way, these distinctions summarize the aporia I have described. The distinctions are: spirit and letter, law and gospel, promise and fulfillment. These are distinctions, formed under the influence of theology, that build a perception structure for the form of reception called "faith." They do not seek to prescribe any conclusions drawn from interpretation. Rather they seek, as the reader works on the metalevel of the text and tries to grasp its meaning, to act as support for an art of reading that unlocks the reader, making the reader open to the structure and perspectives of the text. These distinctions can never lead to a higher insight that would read the texts in a different way, more deeply or more logically than the distinctions like to provide. On the contrary, their "depth" unlocks us in order to draw us out of our self-enclosed existence.

#### THEOLOGICAL RULES OF BIBLE READING

The art of reading Scripture is dependent on a combination of consistency and openness that emerges from biblical texts. Therefore there is a need for reliable aids, such as are provided by Scripture itself. These are rules, bound up with fundamental distinctions that will enable us to perceive each biblical text as it was intended to be heard, and not only heard but listened to. These rules help us not to cut the texts short, not to "harmonize" them arbitrarily, and so to use them appropriately. The theological distinctions "spirit and letter," "law and gospel," and "promise and fulfillment" form a nexus of perceptions for the faithfulness to Scripture; they build a structure for perception of biblical texts. They must not be regarded as expository findings. They rely on experiences in scriptural reasoning that provide basic theological knowledge intertwined with the art of reading. They are rules for dialogue that assist toward a reading that opens the reader for the structure and perspectives of the text. These distinctions cannot encourage an interpretation that is supposedly greater than that which the text itself freely offers, and by which one might read the text any differently, any more deeply or with any greater consequence than what the text provides.

The term "literal sense" indicates that the stories that are being told, and the conflicts and irritations to which the biblical texts direct our attention, draw us into the very questions and answers that are at stake in them. We

have to comprehend their argumentation and not merely reflect upon or even repeat them. Thus today's readers of the Bible are introduced to the different voices that come to speech in Scripture.

The first distinction, *spirit and letter*, is the oldest in the history of biblical understanding in the Christian church, and it has a really extravagant story. Origen took two ideas from it. In the first place, and above all, the art of Bible reading is a spiritual perception<sup>32</sup> requiring prayer.<sup>33</sup> His second idea was fraught with implications for the history of biblical interpretation and had consequences that were highly problematic: "spirit" was conceived as a human capacity, as a divinely imparted intellectual/spiritual sense that is open to the "upper world" as this has entered the world through Jesus Christ and now fills it. This anthropological allocation is problematic because it gives the appearance that the "spirit" does not belong to all Christians, but only to the elect, especially the monks. This leads the church to make a spiritual and sociological demarcation of the "spiritually gifted" from all others. Despite this misleading, special doctrine of Origen, the distinction between spirit and letter helped the early church to read the Holy Scriptures of the Jews as a Christian book. God's Spirit had preceded the law, which shaped Jewish history; it is the Spirit that reveals the logical and temporal first sense of each text.

This distinction refers to a passage from 2 Corinthians 3. Paul stresses its point in 4:5: "For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord." This is then worked out in a very condensed and tangled discussion about the Torah and its reception among the devout Jews. The key sentence reads, "For the letter (*gramma*) kills, but the Spirit gives life" (3:6).

But this translation of *gramma* is misleading. It does not mean, as is so often understood, a "dead letter" in contrast to a "living spirit": that would be something written down in which life has been deposited, in which meaning—so to speak—lies buried until our spiritual or intellectual capacity can raise it up. This is not at all what Paul meant with *gramma*. Rather, to put it more precisely: "it is (only written), lacking the power to effect the obedience that it demands. Since it has no power to transform the readers, it can only stand as a witness to their condemnation."<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Origen, *De principiis* 1.1.9; 4.4.10; *On First Principles*, trans. G. W. Butterworth (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 13, 327–28.

<sup>33</sup> *Epistula ad Gregorium Thaumaturgum* 3; *Patrologia Graeca* 11:92A; *A Letter from Origen to Gregory*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, 4:394.

<sup>34</sup> Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 131.

Augustine makes something different clear in his essay *De spiritu et littera* (4.6–5.8). Here “letter” means the will of God expressed in the law of Sinai. People hide behind this law. In the presence of God they pull back to themselves, paradoxically in their very attempt to penetrate the law. Quite different is Christ, the Spirit, who makes alive and liberates, whom we face standing upright: “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17). He is the living form of the will of God, its *gestalt*. In him God encounters us in divine freedom—in such a direct way that we need not hide. “Thus, the Christian tradition’s reading of the letter-spirit dichotomy as an antithesis between the outward and the inward, the manifest and the latent, the body and the soul, turns out to be a dramatic misreading, indeed a complete inversion,” because Paul points to the community of the new covenant where the Spirit makes “Christ’s message visible to all. The script, however, remains abstract and dead because it is not embodied.”<sup>35</sup>

The distinction between letter and spirit refers to God’s freedom in his judgment. God will not refuse, of course, what God has spoken. On the contrary, God communicates the divine freedom to us and breaks open the walls we have built around ourselves, opening us up to listen to God’s own self. In this respect the distinction between letter and spirit should guide every reading of the Bible. It should draw attention to the fact that we hear and interpret rightly only when we hope that God will break us open for God’s own self.

The second distinction, *law and gospel*, connects with the first and seeks in a particular respect to make it more precise without either superseding or completely replacing it. As a theological (not literary-critical) distinction, it does not seek to separate two sorts of texts from each other, i.e., regulations and words of comfort. It implies rather that every biblical word can encounter us as either law or gospel. In this sense Martin Luther repeatedly called the distinction between law and gospel an art—and it is worth noting in what way he deemed this art to be both indispensable and impossible to achieve.

In a sermon on Galatians 3:23–29 dated January 1, 1532, Luther calls this distinction “the highest art in Christendom, an art with which we should be acquainted.”<sup>36</sup> “Therefore advance whoever is really good at this art and call him Doctor of Holy Scripture, for without the Holy Spirit this distinction

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>36</sup> In *M. Luthers Werke*, vol. 36, ed. Karl Drescher (Weimar: Böhlau, 1909), 25.



cannot be discerned. I experience in myself and observe daily in others how difficult it is. The Holy Spirit belongs to this distinction."<sup>37</sup>

No one can have the authority to state that one text is God's word of judgment and another is God's word of grace. Law is God's sentence of judgment and gospel is God's sentence of salvation. Both may come upon us with the same word, for one person this way, for another person another way, or for the same person in one way one moment and in another way the next. We can neither determine nor codetermine how or when a text will be law or gospel. What we can "know," however, is that God is judge *and* savior. Those who know the difference between God's judging and saving action—and how else can they know it but through the Bible!—will be able to hear the demand of the law where the sound of the gospel prevails, if God so chooses. Or they will be able to hear the message of the gospel and proclaim it when God places demands on them and others. They will understand the one or the other in its time and place and accept it for themselves. As judge and savior God is one and the same, or, to be exact, it is possible that we perceive the same word of God at different times differently, but always as the assurance of God's sovereign faithfulness.

The intent of this distinction is to prepare all who are ready to hear the word of the Bible as God's sentence to expose themselves to the complex action of God and to entrust themselves to this action. They should be ready for this dialectics, no more and no less.

Both of the theological distinctions identified above prepare us to answer the question, Who is the God about whom we read in the Bible? God meets us as personal in God's freedom (spirit and letter) and in God's sentencing (law and gospel).

The third distinction, *promise and fulfillment*, already has been sketched in the first two chapters of this book. It deals with the fact that God promises future action, along with God's future, and even God's own self. Who but God could do that? "The Word of the Lord is truthful, and what he promises he certainly keeps" (Ps. 33:4 in Luther's translation). "For HIS speech is upright, all he does is in faithfulness" (Martin Buber). In speaking, God opens up a stretch of space and time in which God acts.

However, the time-space conception of history is especially susceptible to schematization. In an effort to review contexts of events and categorize them for historical understanding, persons place themselves in time. They do this by distinguishing everything they can already look back on from what is yet to come.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 29.



The theological, not historical, interrelation of promise and fulfillment points to God's speaking and acting, which cannot be separated clearly from each other. By fulfilling what God has promised, God displays his promise. Promise and fulfillment form a unity, and this is why we cannot disassemble them. God does not wait for what God says to come true. "It is a characteristic of God always to reserve further action for himself in the future, but to 'throw forward' some part of that future action into the present *as a promise*."<sup>38</sup> The contour of promise invites us to sense the consummation of God's ongoing work.

God acts in his own way to fulfill what God promises. Therefore "fulfillment" does not mean the filling of a void, but the penetration of all things by the uncreated fullness of God. God keeps what God promises—in just the way that *God* promises. Often God fulfills his promise in a different way than we expect. Fulfillment does not mean that God checks something off (perhaps a segment of history) and leaves it behind with the stamp of "finished" on it. Promise continues to endure as God's pledge for fulfillment. It does not subsist as a kind of remainder, which is still unsettled.

The Christ story is the quintessential paradigm for the richly diverse unity of promise and fulfillment. In Jesus Christ, God confirms the divine promise in such a way that people, in communion with Christ, may hope in God, may expect God anew, and may expect something new from God. We can only believe as those who hope. To read a biblical text as promise means, therefore, to hear it as God's promise of faithfulness. Thus we become aware that God's faithfulness is not a check to be paid in the future. God has already spoken the divine Yes here and now, therefore we can cling to that Yes. In this regard the third distinction to be observed in reading the Bible carries the reading of Scripture to a special level, without canceling out the other two. Kept in mutual movement, they work together, increasingly opening up new and surprising, often disturbing, perspectives and proving to be signs of faithfulness to Scripture.

<sup>38</sup> Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*, 3rd ed. (Akron, Ohio: OSL Publications, 2002), 19, summarizing my second thesis, *Zukunft und Verbeissung: Das Problem der Zukunft in der gegenwärtigen philosophischen und theologischen Diskussion* (The problem of the future in the contemporary philosophical and theological discussion) (Zürich: Zwingli, 1965).

# On the Sinking of the Titanic

by KARL BARTH

Safenwil, Sunday, 21 April 1912

Psalm 103:15-17

*This sermon was preached by theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) in the Swiss town of Safenwil in 1912. It has been reprinted here from The Word in this World: Two Sermons by Karl Barth. The book, published in 2007 by Regent College Publishing, Vancouver, Canada, was edited by Kurt I. Johanson, and the sermons were translated from the German by Christopher Asprey. This sermon has been reprinted with the permission of Pastor Johanson.*

*As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children. (NKJV)*

Dear parishioners,

At the start of last week we were all taken aback by the news of the sinking of the English steamship "Titanic," bound for America, on which more than 1500 lives were lost in the waters of the Atlantic Ocean. And since then we have not been able to pick up a newspaper without learning new details about this catastrophe, whose proportions and circumstances are quite unique. I don't know whether this event has preoccupied you as much as it has me. If up until now it has not, then today I would like to encourage you to reflect on it. For I believe that, just as we may not approach events such as this one out of curiosity and a thirst for sensation, nor may we disregard them in silence and indifference, however much daily newspaper reports might cause us to do so. Rather, they should speak to us. For through them God addresses us with a power and urgency that we only rarely perceive: concerning the greatness and nothingness of human beings who are so like God, and yet so unlike him, concerning the wrath and the mercy of the eternal God who reigns in us and over our destinies, sometimes close at hand and tangibly, but sometimes infinitely far away and mysteriously. God speaks in this way even through a tragedy like the one which has shocked the entire civilised world this week, and we cannot fail to hear, nor may we.

Let us recall once more what we have chillingly witnessed. On Wednesday 10 April a ship left the port of Southampton in England for the first time, a construction the like of which the world had never seen before. For decades Germany and England have been competing to manufacture the largest, most

comfortable and quickest ocean liner. Each has overtaken the other again and again. Five years ago in Hamburg, I had the chance to see one of these massive ships for myself, which at that time seemed to be the most enormous thing that human inventiveness and energy could create. But since then it has been easily overtaken by others. Fourteen days ago the Titanic, along with another English ship built identically, was now leading the field. A miracle of the modern human mind, which utterly surpasses even the most fantastical images any of us could conjure up, it has been appropriately called an amphibious town. Just imagine a ship that is 280 metres long and 30 metres wide. The lowest deck alone rises 20 metres above the water like a tower. Three more decks tower above it, and beneath the waterline it descends to unfathomable depths, where there are storerooms and engine rooms, which one can imagine looking like a tall and spacious factory hall. A crew of 800 mans this monster, of which 300 work on the engines alone. Besides that, however, there are board and lodgings for 5000 passengers. And these passengers—those who can pay, at any rate—lack none of those finer things of life which they afford themselves on dry land. And so, there are on board: a garden restaurant, complete with trees and exotic creepers, a children's playroom, a swimming pool, Turkish and electric baths, a gallery with boutiques in which you can buy luxuries such as jewels and lace, a roller-skating rink, a gymnasium, a dancehall, a fish-pool for anglers, a theatre and another garden. Evidently, the travellers also enjoyed private cabins furnished with every comfort, excellent cuisine and all kinds of entertainment, none of which the finest hotel could provide better. It is like a dream world, all this refined ease and splendour floating on top of the unfathomable depths of the ocean, propelled by engines of 46,000 horsepower. In scarcely six days it was to reach New York and the quicker the better, as the captain well knew; every minute of speed on the journey was precious. For it was a matter of breaking the record, i.e., of cutting down even more, if possible, on the time it had taken other ships to cross, so as to get there in the quickest time yet. If it succeeded, the reputation of the shipping company that owned the Titanic would soar, and more importantly, so would its shares. And the captain must have done everything he could to achieve this target. It's just that he was even too eager. For the crossing from Europe to America is not as safe as we tend to think. Great masses of glacier ice broken off from the coast of Greenland are continually drifting southwards, not in small blocks but in massive fields and mountains, the great bulk of which, however, always floats under the surface of the sea. Cautious sailors will always cross this icy expanse with great caution, indeed they prefer to make a detour to avoid it. But taking caution and making detours was not consistent with the Titanic

breaking the speed record, and so things had to be done differently. The ship motored at full steam day and night, and it took the most direct route. And so we come to last Sunday evening. The end was no longer far off. A few passengers were sitting, enjoying all manner of diversions; others had retired to their beds. At that moment they were disturbed by a jolt that shook the entire ship. But they hardly noticed it, since the ship was too big for people to realise what had happened at first. We hear stories of some people who calmly went on playing cards. The captain has the musicians on board strike up a merry tune. In reality, the front portion of the vessel has collided at full force with an iceberg floating under water, and it has been completely smashed up in a number of places. The formidable steel panels have been snapped like matchsticks, and with them all the safety measures are breached, and water is already pouring inside at full force. The disaster can no longer be covered up, and it is a matter of putting emergency plans into action. 2200 people are on board, yet there are only twenty lifeboats. One is astonished to read how the crew took up positions under orders from their officers to evacuate the boat as they had been drilled, how, without hesitation, men allowed women and children to go ahead of them to fill the spaces that were available, how the ship's musicians kept playing to provide a sense of calm assurance, how a brave officer kept the wireless telegraph transmitter going until the last minute, so as to send out a distress signal to every corner of the dark ocean. Help came, but it came too late: the nearest boat took four hours to arrive and could do nothing but take on board the 700 or so occupants of the lifeboats, who had half-died of cold. The Titanic itself had long since disappeared into the deep. It must have been a terrible sight when at last the whole ship, in the full glare of its electric lights, rose vertically out of the water once more, only to sink straight under. The last thing that was heard were a few pistol shots which are said to have been the captain taking his own life. We cannot imagine the scenes of horror and the deadly struggle that was played out inside, in the cabins and corridors, in the remotest reaches of the engine rooms. And now the Titanic and all its treasures, the wonders of its technology and design, its seven million letters to America, and above all its 1500 human lives, lies buried 4000 metres below the sea, in murky depths which have never seen a ray of light. And no one alive will ever set eyes on it again.

Indeed, as for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. This terrible catastrophe proclaims that with an awful clarity. It is infinitely difficult to find the right words to express what these facts silently preach to us. We humans so easily become senseless and superficial when we



have to speak about things like this, or else we make rash and presumptuous judgments, as if we had been sitting in the divine council when this incident was being ordained. And so I would like to tell you clearly but cautiously what thoughts and impressions this event has left with me. I know that whatever I can say will not suffice. Do not stop short at my words, then, but consider for yourselves what God wished to say to us through this.

First: the devastating impression of the smallness and helplessness of humankind, of everything its intellectual powers have created, and of the impressive advances made in this 20<sup>th</sup> century. You must understand me rightly when I say this. I fear that in many church pulpits today it will be claimed that such advances made in the perfecting of technology are somehow ungodly and even demonic, that a disaster such as this one reminds us again that God will have none of it. The simple-minded will draw the conclusion that it is a sin to build ships this big and to journey across the sea in them. Quite the reverse, I am saying. It is entirely God's will that the world's technology and machinery attain to higher degrees of perfection. For technology is nothing other than mastery over nature, it is labour, and the divine spirit in humanity ought to expand in this labour and to prosper. If people did not invent things, or if they did not wish to make proper use of things that have been invented, that would be the work of the devil. And therefore it is also entirely God's will that people build large, swift and comfortable ships, and venture out upon the seas in them. It is not at all religious, but utterly irreligious, to make the sign of the cross before this idea. But I nevertheless get the impression that in this disaster God has intended to show us once more that he is the boss. This is what I mean by that: there is a way of using technology that cannot be called labour any more, but playful arrogance. It is arrogance to install theatres and fish-pools on a vessel exposed to these sort of risks, as is obviously still the case today with an ocean steamship. It is arrogance, because mind and body and money are being expended upon luxury and frivolities instead of on safeguarding against such disasters. Dancing and putting on plays and fishing, when one has not yet made sufficient provision for being caught out by icebergs: that is called acting in total assurance, as if there were nothing left to discover. There is a lie to be seen in the contrast between all the fuss and bother on board this ship and the helpless way in which it then had to submit to a very elementary force of nature. The catastrophe brought this lie to light. God will not be mocked. He certainly intends us to work and to achieve something in the world. But he does not intend us to act as though we were done with working, and could now go fooling around. If that is what we will do, then he will be done with us. He does not always show us that. But sometimes he does, and



he sends us an iceberg to remind us that we have no reason to play the fool, when we should be working and battling away. God has not set a limit to technology, to progress, to the human mind. Quite the reverse! They are called to immortality. But when we become godless about the headway we have made, i.e. when we become bumptious and conceited and childish, then we need to be called to order. With all our understanding and progress, if we begin to feel unsure of ourselves once more, if we feel something of the gravity of our situation again—

Midway through the course of life,  
When death doth us surround,  
Whom may we call upon to help,  
Where is mercy to be found?

—then we are as God will have us, for then we do not spend our lives playing childish games, but on things that are obviously serious and worthwhile. This is where he wants to lead us when he reminds us of our smallness and helplessness through tragedies like this.

Secondly: this disaster did not have to happen. If we have to say of the Titanic and its 1500 victims today, they are gone and their place remembers them no more, the blame for this lies with humanity. It is true that God set that iceberg on its course, but no one was compelled to get in its way. It is well worth considering how much intellectual brilliance and diligent hard work had gone into building this ship and making it as safe as possible. And again, how the passengers placed their complete confidence in the trustworthiness of those who had built it. But also, how this confidence was conditional on the trustworthiness of the 800-man crew, from the captain right down to the last boiler-man. That was all good and proper, and everything held together like links in a chain. Only there was one faulty link. The captain did not just have the safety of his passengers to think about, but also, and principally, the commission he had been given by the shareholders who were employing him, to break that speed record if he possibly could, on the ship's very first voyage. And it is because of this fragile link in the chain of trustworthiness, because of this guilt, that the Titanic went under, along with 1500 human beings. And it is on this guilt which ran the Titanic into the iceberg that we must now reflect. We will certainly apportion only the smallest measure of it to the unfortunate captain, who was an old man and intended that the first voyage of this new ship would be famous for being his last. Even though he took his own life, he now stands before a higher judge who judges according to more lofty standards than we could. But those who are guilty are the ones who made this a fragile chain by charging the old man

with these orders: i.e., the shipping company whose president was also travelling on the Titanic and is among those who have been rescued—unfortunately, we are almost tempted to say. It is these people who saw this expensive ship, and all the intellectual effort which went into building it as well as the 800 sailors and 1400 passengers on board, as a great money-making operation. It is they above all who placed the safety of 2200 lives beneath their desire to compete with other companies. It is they who, for the sake of their dividends, have 1500 dead people on their consciences, together with all the distress this has brought upon families on both sides of the ocean. But ultimately not even this shipping company bears all the guilt for this disaster, but first and foremost the system of acquisition by which thousands of companies like this one are getting rich today, not only through shipping but across the whole spectrum of human labour. Yesterday in the “Freier Aargauer” newspaper the sinking of the Titanic was referred to as a crime of capitalism. After everything that I have now read about it I can only agree. Indeed, this catastrophe is a crude but all-the-more clear example to us of the essential characteristics and the effects of capitalism, which consists in a few individuals competing with each other at the expense of everyone else in a mad and foolish race for profits. Exactly the same course of events has already been played out in many other areas of labour. Indeed, it is almost tempting to interpret every feature of this catastrophe symbolically: the ship of human workers races onwards, but it is not consideration for the many which is at the helm, but the self-interest of the few. What about the engines? What about the people? The engines and the people are only machines for making money. The sinking of the Titanic teaches us where this ordering of society and labour will lead, if we have not already learnt this anywhere else. This is the fragile link in the chain of trustworthiness. As long as self-interest is not now eradicated and replaced by the idea of one-for-all and all-for-one; as long as we do not now repent and strive for a truly communal labour, we run the risk of conjuring down upon ourselves calamities of a quite different sort than the sinking of the Titanic.

But in spite of the sin and guilt of humanity which we see reflected in this event, we may now draw attention to the other side of the matter, as it is raised specifically by this event as well: But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children’s children. It is God’s mercy that gives us hope in spite of sin and guilt. It creates in us the faith and childlike confidence which overcome sin and guilt, and build up the kingdom of God. So this shipping disaster doesn’t merely point up our helplessness and our faults, our broken arrogance and our secret egotism. Nor does this [mercy] just proclaim to us our transience

and its cause. It declares to us with a clarity we rarely experience that God's purposes are advancing in the world. One senses something of how Christ is becoming an ever greater force in the world, when one reads of those who did not seek to save themselves but did their duty, who ultimately did all they could, not for themselves but for others, who silently and nobly retreated in the face of death to allow those who were weaker than them to continue on the path of life. In view of facts such as these, it takes great unbelief to keep referring to our age as evil and godless. No, the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting; it shone through the death and destruction of this disaster, so that we are grateful to be able to see it so plainly. In the attitude and conduct of those ordinary sailors during the most severe hour of testing, we see once again a sign of the new heaven and the new earth for which we are waiting. People will labour just as they did, when one day they will not labour for their own interests but as citizens of God's kingdom. This sign must not pass us by in vain. These courageous and selfless people must not be allowed to have drowned at sea for nothing. Rather, the message of God's mercy from everlasting to everlasting, which they have proclaimed to us, should prick our hearts and consciences; it should rouse us, shake us and get us up on our feet. It should lead us out of our mortality and sin to righteousness. If it does that, then we will not forget this horrifying event. Amen.

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McGinnis and Patricia K. Tull, editors. SBL Symposium Series. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006. Pp. 87-105.  
*Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Studies*, New Testament Editor

### CHARLES C. WEST

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### RICHARD FOX YOUNG

- "East Asia." In *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 9, *World Christianities, c. 1914-c. 2000*, Hugh McLeod, editor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Pp. 450-67, 675-76.
- "Singer of the 'Sovereign Lord': Hindu Pietism and Christian *Bhakti* in the Conversions of Kanapati Vattiyar, 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Tranquebar Tamil Poet." With Daniel Jeyaraj. In *Halle and the Beginning of Protestant Christianity in India*, vol. 2, *Christian Mission in the Indian Context*, Andreas Gross et al., editors. Halle: Verlag der Franckeschen Stiftungen, 2006. Pp. 951-72.
- "The 'Scotch Metaphysics' in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Benares." *Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 4:2 (2006): 139-57.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Devillers, Luc. *La Fête de l'Envoyé: La section Johannique de la fête des Tentes (Jean 7, 1-10, 21) et la christologie*, Études Bibliques, n. s. no. 49. Paris: J. Gabalda, 2002. Pp. 598. € 75 (Euro).

Luc Devillers is a New Testament professor in the École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem. He is well known for his distinguished work on the Gospel of John (see especially *Horizons de la foi*, Nos. 36, 53, and 72 and his articles in *RevThom* 89.2, *RevBib* 104.1, 105.4, 106.2, 112.1 and the revisions of John in *Bible de Jérusalem*).

This book is a revised doctoral dissertation, which was directed by M. Morgen of Strasbourg and accepted by the École Biblique. In many ways, Professor Devillers carries on the rich tradition of the École: focusing on historical and exegetical studies of the biblical books, with a sensitive use and appreciation of writings “on the fringes of the canon,” and an in-depth knowledge of the topography and archaeology of ancient Palestine. In particular, one feels the influence of Benoit and especially Boismard in this careful philological approach that is informed by archaeological discoveries and a critical assessment of the literary development of the Gospel of John in relation to the Synoptic tradition.

*La Fête de l'Envoyé* is a focused exegetical study of Sukkot (Feast of Booths or Tabernacles) in the Gospel of John (the feast is mentioned in the New Testament only in Jn 7:2). The approach is a mixture of diachronic and synchronic methodology, which is called “eclectic” by Devillers. The thesis offered is a hypothesis that in their final (but noncanonical) form (that is, without 7:53–8:11), chapters seven through ten of the Gospel of John constitute a section carefully structured. In these chapters, Jesus’s conflict with the Ioudaioi rises to a radical crescendo. The chapters are dominated by Christological motifs woven within the framework of the Feast of Tabernacles. The book is divided into three sections.

Section One (“The Feast of Tabernacles”) covers the history of Sukkot as well as the meaning of the Gihon Spring and Pool of Siloam. Devillers might be correct when he argues that the Gihon Spring in the first century was perceived to possess life-giving water. The Gihon Spring becomes the Pool of Siloam; recent excavations (those after the publication of Devillers’s book) at the site prove that the pool was a large mikva (Jewish ritual bath) that was used during the time of Jesus and ceased to exist in 70 CE, when the area was covered by the destruction from the First Revolt (66–70 [and until 74 at Masada]). This water source is also mentioned in the Lives of the Prophets

(rightly dated to the first century CE); the "Life of Isaiah" (that is, chapter 1) reports that the Pool of Siloam is so called because it means "sent" (LivPro 1:2). Thus, the Fourth Evangelist may be building Christology on topographical symbolism in Jerusalem.

Section Two ("Jesus and the Ioudaioi") is devoted to the alleged anti-Semitism in the Gospel of John. Devillers argues, correctly, that the Gospel of John is not anti-Semitic. He prefers to transliterate (not translate as "Jews") Ioudaioi, which sometimes (as I have argued) means "some Judean leaders," as in John 11:54 (the following *ekeithen* is an adverb of place that defines the preceding noun, Ioudaioi). Devillers sees a connection between "being cast out of the synagogue" and the Birkat ha-Minnim; he holds to the argument that the portrayal of the Ioudaioi is connected to a social world behind the gospel. Letters from the time of Simon bar Kosiba (132–36 CE) are important. One proves that the plants associated with Sukkot—the lulav (palm branch), etrog (citron), myrtle (a branch), and willow—are not rabbinic creations but antedate 136 CE. The other, the "Letter of Soumaïos," indicates that "the feast of the Ioudaioi" is neither anti-Jewish terminology nor rhetoric. Likewise, the expression "on account of the fear of the Jews" in Esther 8:17 [LXX] suggests that in the Gospel of John the appearances of this phrase (namely 7:13) indicate that the negative sayings about the Ioudaioi most likely apply only to the high priests and Jewish leaders (Pharisees) and not to "Jews" (in support of Urban von Wahlde). As one weighs this claim, due consideration should be given to the different contexts in which the phrase occurs.

Section Three ("The Johannine Section on the Feast of Tabernacles") is devoted to chapters seven through ten of the Gospel of John. Devillers argues that John 7–10 is a cohesive unity; it reveals that "the Father" is the dominant actor in this section of John. He wisely argues that Isaianic traditions help illumine John 8 (as well as Jubilees and the Targum of Isaiah). Devillers helps us better comprehend the complex flow of traditions that preceded, accompanied, and followed the composition of the Gospel of John.

Important for readers of this bulletin is the demonstration that the Gospel of John is not anti-Semitic and the importance of the final word in the title: "Christology." Devillers shows that a study of so-called noncanonical texts (for example, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Jewish apocryphal works, and the Targumim) helps disclose John's Christology. These texts adumbrate Jesus's claim to be "the Light" and God's Son sent into the world. John's Christology becomes clearer: Jesus is God's envoy. There is no polemic against the Feast of Tabernacles; rather, this feast is the most excellent feast as it foreshadows Jesus as God's emissary. The feast signifies the Feast of the

Envoy, the One Sent; and the water from Siloam is life-giving. Thus, Jesus is the True Siloam, the One sent by the Father. Devillers is correct to argue that John's Christology is "profoundly theocentric"; Jesus frequently refers to the Father as "he who sent me" (for example, 7:28 and 8:18).

The well-known Christological idea of Jesus as One Sent demands full discussion. The Fourth Evangelist many times uses the verb "to send" and usually it refers to Jesus (see 17:18-26), but the perfect passive participle "sent" is reserved for John the Baptist (see also 1:19 and 3:17; each is an aorist). The Baptist is portrayed as a man "sent from God" (1:6; [in John, *apostellein* appears twenty-eight times but *apostolos* only once, in 13:16, and there the noun is not a synonym for Jesus]). Thus, the Fourth Evangelist uses many symbols for Jesus, but he never calls Jesus *apostolos*, "Envoy" (in Jewish Greek, the noun appears only in Josephus and there only once, in *Antiquities* 17.300).

Devillers presents compelling reasons to conclude that Jubilees, Pseudo-Eupolemus, and the Lives of the Prophets may have influenced the Fourth Evangelist. He argues that according to the narrative of John 9, the man born blind is linked to Jesus, since both are given the ability to use, in an absolute sense, *ego eimi* ("I am"). This claim is conceivable but not persuasive. The argument that a variant in 7:1 (Jesus had no power to go about Judea) should be chosen as the best (or original) text helps bring out the humanity of Jesus in this gospel, but the textual witnesses for it are weak.

This well-researched, critical, and creative book deserves to be translated into English for readers in the United States and elsewhere who are not conversant with French (preferably the abbreviated version that appeared in 2005 in Lire I Bible 143).

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Porter, Stanley E., ed. *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007. Pp. xiv + 268. \$29.00

Ten scholars contributed to *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments* (S. E. Porter, T. Longman III, M. J. Boda, A. Wolters, L. T. Stuckenbruck, I. H. Marshall, T. Thatcher, S. A. Cummins, C. L. Westfall, and C. A. Evans). The book is divided into two parts: Part I covers the Old Testament and related perspectives and Part II focuses on the New Testament perspective.

In seminary, many of us read Sigmund Mowinckel's *He That Cometh* (1954) and Helmer Ringgren's *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (1956). Mowinckel



sought to limit the concept of a Messiah to a political ruler, a king. Ringgren widened the concept to include some figure beyond Israel. Our fascination has usually been sparked by an interest in the development of the concept of the Messiah—that is, God’s unique cosmic and eschatological “Anointed One”—and especially by a need to understand more fully Jesus’s self-understanding. Did Jesus think he was the Messiah? Reading Mark 8 and Matthew’s redaction (Matt. 16)—perhaps under the influence of the Bultmannians—led many of us to conclude that Jesus never proclaimed himself the Messiah and did not have a messianic consciousness.

Now, in light of Jewish thoughts preserved in the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (especially Pss and 4 Ezra) and the Dead Sea Scrolls (especially 1QS), we know that Jews often thought that no one could be the Messiah if he claimed to be the Messiah or accepted that affirmation from a disciple. Only God knew the time of the appearance of the Messiah. Only God could declare one to be the Messiah. Thinking on these Jewish texts prompted many of us to conclude that Jesus probably did not claim to be the Messiah and did not accept Peter’s confession; these insights signify that Jesus may have imagined that God would soon declare him to be the Messiah. That means that Jesus could have thought he was the designated Messiah.

Advances in the study of Jewish messianism over the past two decades is highlighted by the following selected publications: J. Neusner, et al., *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (1987 [and Neusner’s earlier *Messiah in Context* (1984)]); J. H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Messiah* (1992); J. J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (1995); P. E. Satterthwaite, R. S. Hess, and G. J. Wenham, eds., *The Lord’s Anointed* (1995); A. Laato, *A Star is Rising* (1997); S. E. Porter, et al., *Images of Christ* (1997); Charlesworth, H. Lichtenberger, and G. S. Oegema, eds., *Qumran-Messianism* (1998); W. Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ* (1998); Oegema, *The Anointed and His People* (1998); W. Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ* (1998); and M. Wise, *The First Messiah: Investigating the Savior Before Jesus* (1999).

In addition to these seminal studies, exploration of the origin of New Testament Christology, usually with informed reflections on Jewish messianism before the Mishnah, has been impressive, with the appearance of such post-1990 books as the following: P. M. Casey, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God* (1991); M. Hengel, *Studies in Early Christology* (1995); W. R. Farmer, ed., *Crisis in Christology* (1995); N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1996); H. Schwarz, *Christology* (1998); D. Seccombe, *The King of God’s Kingdom* (2002); J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (2003 [as well as his earlier *Chris-*

*tology in the Making*, 1980 and 1989)); and S. W. Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (2006).

The book contains the edited proceedings of the 2004 H. H. Bingham Colloquium in New Testament at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. Why should one purchase and read this collection? Here are some reasons:

1) It presents the major issues, which are discussed by scholars, including some luminaries in the field who represent a wide spectrum of theological positions.

2) It presents the realization that "David," "Moses," and "the suffering servant" (namely, "my servant, the Messiah" in 2 Bar 70:9) developed messianic overtones before the destruction of Israel in 136 CE.

3) It explains the recognition that early Jews developed significantly diverse cultural expectations and that Jews did not read scripture in terms of a core tradition about an eschatological Messiah.

4) It observes that nonmessianic passages in the Old Testament were interpreted as messianic by some early Jews (including those who wrote documents in the New Testament).

5) It emphasizes that the documents in the Old and New Testaments contain a variety of views that should not be neatly systematized.

6) It explains that the evangelist Mark has Peter confess Jesus as the Messiah and God declare that he is "My Son" but shows that Mark narratively presents Jesus as the Son of Man who is destined to suffer.

7) It reveals that in Luke and Acts, Jesus is depicted primarily as the anointed prophet.

8) It explains that in John, apparent contradictions, irony, and misunderstanding are employed, on the one hand, to portray Jesus as a divine figure, and, on the other hand, to stress Jesus's historical nature and physicality (Jesus was "water and blood").

9) It explains that Jesus as Messiah is foundational for Paul's theology, ecclesiology, and eschatology.

10) It discusses why many today still wonder, "Why did Jews not recognize Jesus as the Messiah?" and explains that this question mirrors a misunderstanding of the pre-70 CE Palestinian Jews and the communities formed by Jesus from Nazareth.

The book reflects careful thought and intense study of many publications on Jewish messianism. Unfortunately, no author cites or benefits from the contributions either in P. Schäfer and M. Cohen, eds., *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco* (1998) or in I. Gruenwald, S. Shaked, and G. Stroumsa, eds., *Messiah and Christos: Studies in the Jewish*

*Origins of Christianity: Presented to David Flusser* (1992). The authors also show no knowledge of the important insights presented by the following erudite experts: B. Pixner, *Wege des Messias und Stätten der Kirche* (ed. R. Riesner, 1991); R. Mayer, *War Jesus Messias? der Geschichte der Messiasse Israels in drei Jahrtausenden* (1998); and G. Jossa, *Dal Messia al Cristo* (2000). A selected bibliography should have been compiled and added to the book.

In light of the growing interest in the shaping of the canon, the recognition that the canon was not closed when the biblical books were composed, and that many documents (such as the Temple Scroll and the Books of Enoch) were considered scriptural and inspired by many Jews before and during Jesus's time, one should ponder to what extent the constant use of "Old Testament" and "New Testament" hinders a vision of early Jews, such as those who composed the documents in the New Testament, as they intermittently but sporadically used language that may be considered messianic. Each section notes the "Perspective" found in the Old Testament or in the New Testament, but each contributor points to divergent perspectives in the biblical books (and sometimes within them and related documents).

As the editors to Flusser's Festschrift, all of whom are Jewish, state: "[T]his interest in the past should be exercised not as an antiquarian fascination with dead objects, but it should all be part of an urgent and pressing intellectual concern, accompanied by certain religious undertones . . ." Surely, along with the contributors to *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments*, we should concur. All who imagine or proclaim that Jesus is the Messiah will benefit from the thoughtful chapters in this book.

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Paul, Shalom M., Robert A. Kraft, Lawrence H. Schiffman, and Weston W. Fields, with Eva Ben-David, eds. *Emanuel: Studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint, and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov*. Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 94. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2003. Pp. xxxvi + 849. \$201.00. And Index Volume. Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 94.2. Pp. 89.

Emanuel Tov, Judah L. Magnes Professor of Bible in the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, is one of the most respected experts on the Scribal School at Qumran (see especially his studies of the Septuagint and the Hebrew Bible). Under his direction, most of the twenty-eight volumes in the Oxford University Press's *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert* were published.

Tov deserves to be honored by his colleagues. In this collection he receives such a salute. As stated in the "Biography," Tov is demanding and exact yet

gentle; he is generous and unassuming. The "Bibliography" of his publications is impressive and helpful to the research scholar.

The volume contains distinguished contributions by scholars from numerous countries. It is divided into three parts. Part One is focused on Qumran. This section includes: studies on the elusive high priest in 1QSb (M. Abegg Jr.), the origins of Jewish opposition to Rome (P. S. Alexander), theological elements in Qumran law (J. M. Baumgarten), Qumran "Desert Theology" (M. J. Bernstein), Qumran phylacteries (G. J. Brooke), revealing unseen consonants in the Temple Scroll (J. H. Charlesworth), Qumran psalms (E. G. Chazon), community formulation in the DSS (J. J. Collins), tampering with Qumran texts (H. Cotton and E. Larson), women in the DSS and Qumran (S. W. Crawford), the structure of the "Son of God" apocalypse (F. M. Cross), Samaritan scribal habits (A. D. Crown), a reappraisal of the Apocryphon of Joshua (D. Dimant), a hymn with wisdom (T. Elgvin), dating the Samaritan Pentateuch (E. Eshel and H. Eshel), Nahum and Habakkuk in the Septuagint and Qumran (H.-J. Fabry), Abraham's faith and righteousness in a Qumran text (J. A. Fitzmyer), scriptures at Qumran (P. Flint), the canonical history of the Hebrew Bible (A. Lange), Qumran messianism (H. Lichtenberger), the community rule 4 (T. Muraoka), Qumran biblical exegesis (B. Nitzan), variant euphemisms in 2 Sam. 12:14 at Qumran (D. W. Perry), the Jerusalem gates in the New Jerusalem (E. Puech), the Qumran psalms scroll and canon criticism (J. A. Sanders), utopia and reality at Qumran (L. H. Schiffman), Aramaic and Greek Levi (M. E. Stone), the scribe of 1QS (E. Tigchelaar), the Masada pentateuchal manuscripts (E. Ulrich), the Pharisees and oral traditions (J. C. VanderKam), and eschatology at Qumran and in the New Testament (G. Vermes). This section takes up more than half the collection.

Part Two is focused on the Septuagint. This section includes: studies on the significance of Septuagint studies (R. Sollamo), Septuagint lexicography reflecting Ptolemaic Greek (J. A. L. Lee), parataxis in biblical narratives (F. H. Polak), the textual character of MS 106 (J. W. Wevers), LXX or old Greek fragments in the Pierpont Morgan Library (R. A. Kraft), Joshua in OG and MT (K. De Troyer), pseudovariants and ghost names in the historical books (N. F. Fernández Marcos), the Greek of Proverbs (J. Cook), messianism in Ezekiel (J. Lust), Ben Sira's prologue (B. G. Wright), Psalm 3 in Greek (A. Pietersma), and the "Holy Land" in Pseudo-Philo, 4 Ezra, and 2 Baruch (D. J. Harrington).

Part Three is focused on the Hebrew Bible. This section includes: studies on blood in Israel and Mesopotamia (T. Abusch), haplography in 1 Chronicles (D. N. Freedman and D. Miano), prophecies against the nations in



Jeremiah (M. Haran), "Lebanon" in the transition from Derash to Peshat (S. Japhet), religion and politics in Psalm 2 (I. Knohl), textual criticism in the Hebrew Bible (A. Van der Kooij), the Redactor of HR (J. Milgrom), a double entendre in Job 15:32 (S. M. Paul), corrections due to the unification of religion (A. Rofé), the significance of אַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים and אַחֲרֵית in the Hebrew Bible (S. Talmon), expressions of solidarity (J. H. Tigay), high treason in the Temple Scroll (M. Weinfeld), and implied synonyms and antonyms (Y. Zakovitch).

Readers of the *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* will be pleased to learn that Tov (born Menno Toff) was saved in the Netherlands from the Shoah (the Holocaust) by Christians. Not everything in this volume will excite the interest of such readers, although they will learn how and in what ways "the Book of the People" came to us from "the People of the Book." That is, the formation of the text of our scriptures and the shaping of our canon was a long, complicated process.

The volume should have contained a list of contributors with identifications. The separate index volume lists biblical and Jewish apocryphal sources, Dead Sea Scrolls, Philo, Josephus, Rabbinics, classical and ancient Christian writings, papyri, Near Eastern texts, and names. Any library devoted to these subjects should obtain these two books; they should also be in the reference library of major theological schools.

James Hamilton Charlesworth  
Princeton Theological Seminary





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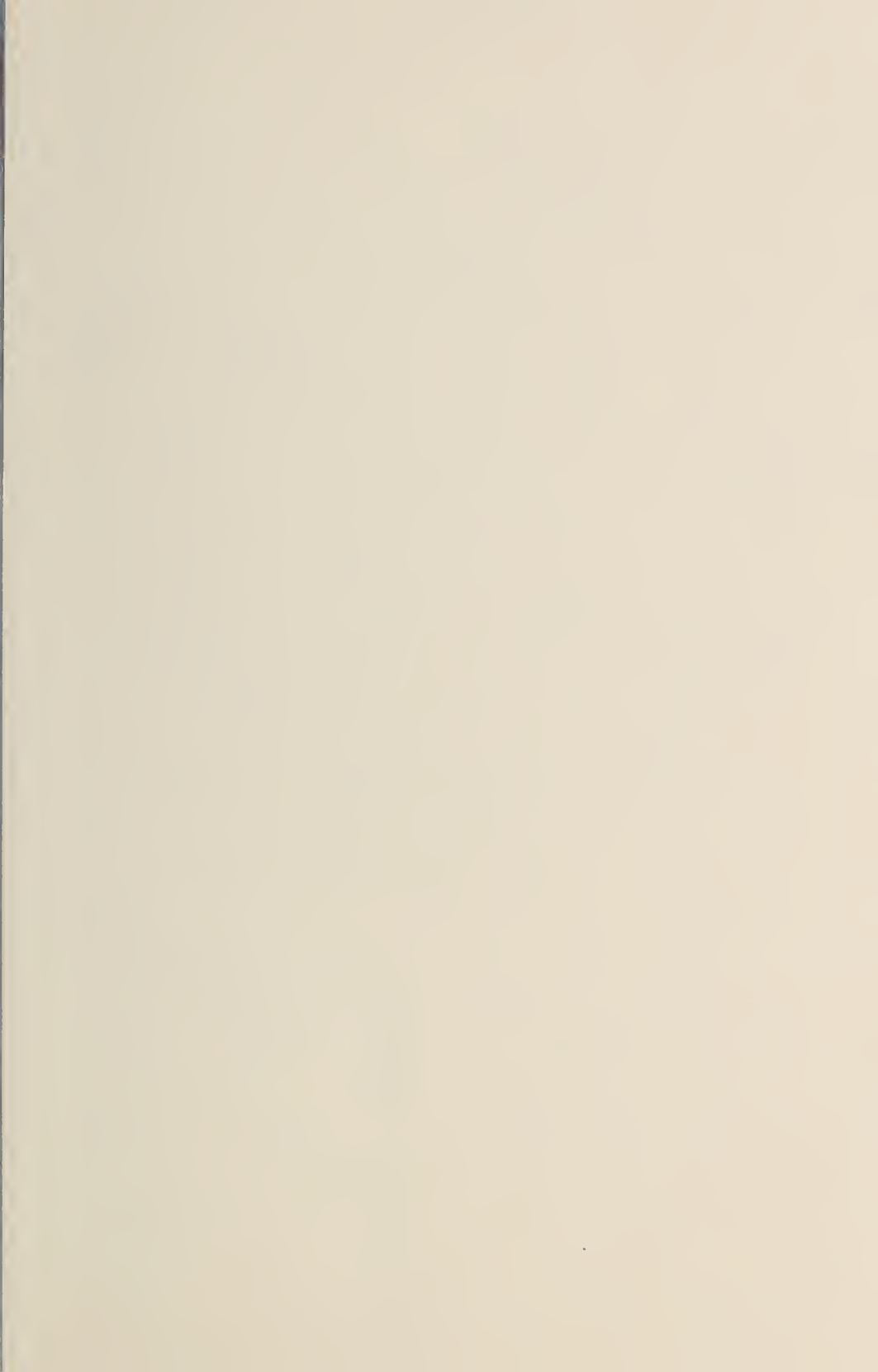
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